THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

JUNE, 1957

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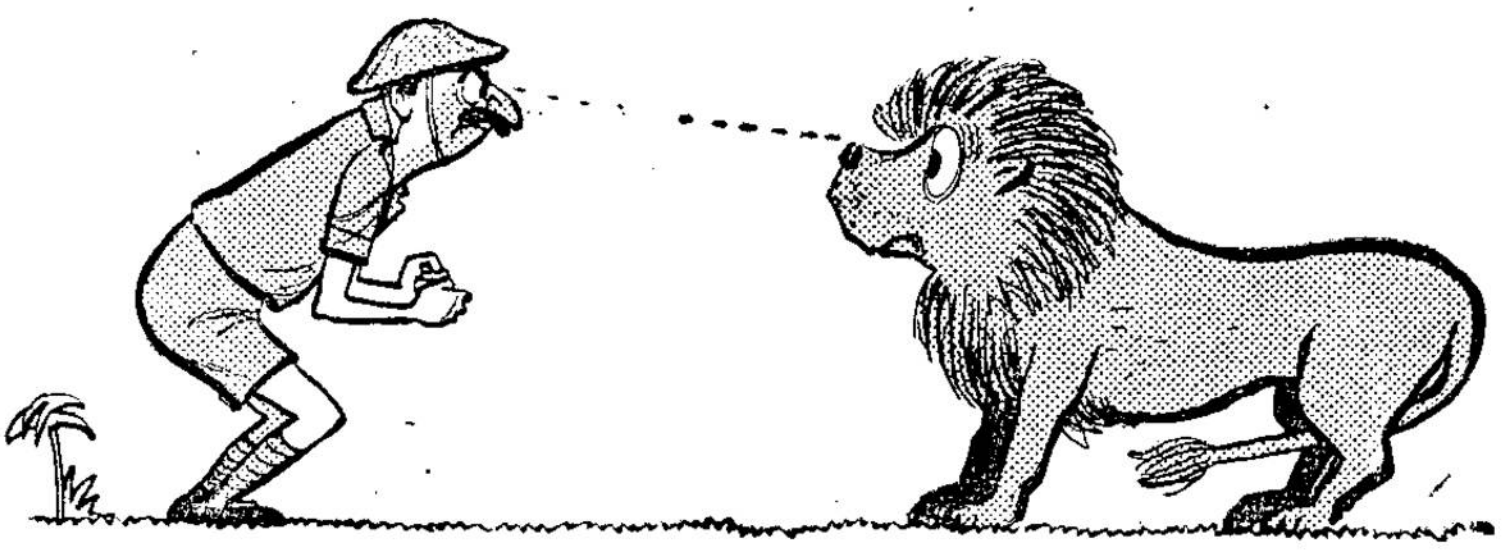

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ARGOSY

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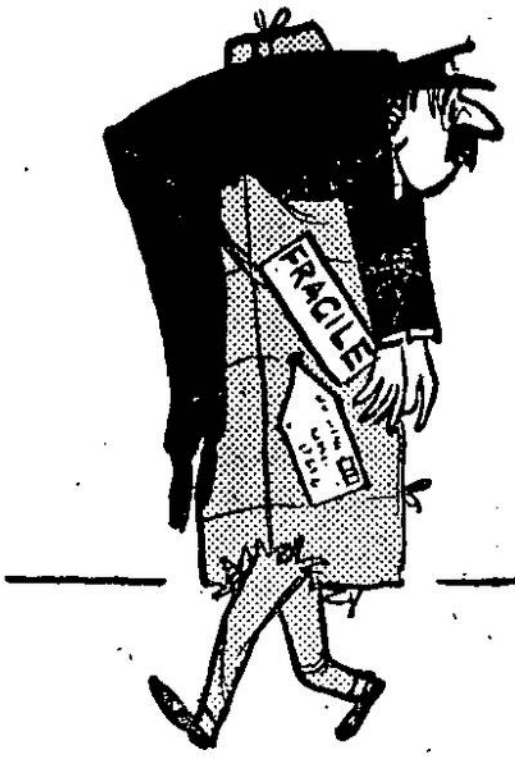


ARGOSY Log Book

WE came across a newspaper report recently of some railway passengers who were found under a train seat, packed in large waterproof parcels, trying to avoid the high cost of rail fares. Plastic sticky tape is wonderful stuff, and if you take a pencil-torch with you on the journey, it is possible to read Argosy inside your parcel in comparative comfort.

The parcel habit, if it becomes widespread, is certainly going to revolutionize fiction, particularly the Argosy type of story. Take for example the case of the Laird of Ardluck whom we will imagine living on a remote Hebridean island engaged on espionage for a foreign Power. Each day the panting postman rows across from the mainland with a huge parcel marked Strelsau University Library, *Buchpost*. Ostensibly the Laird is engaged on geological studies.

One day Jock staggers up the landing-steps with a parcel from a well-known firm of Perth dyers, remarking, "Losh, Ardluck, ye're having some awfu' heavy parcels these days but yon's the waurst o' the lot."

"It will be the blankets come back from cleaning," says the Laird's wife, reading her mail. "Och, maircy, Aunt Tabitha writes she's sending us a bonny surprise."

"Nothing that woman does could be bonny," says the Laird, opening Argosy, which has come by the same post.

A loud and angry rapping from

inside the parcel announces the presence of irate Aunt Tabitha, arrived on a surprise visit.

Meanwhile the villainous Dr. Dakobra is on his way to liquidate the Laird, suspected of being in touch with M.I.5. He arrives by the second post marked *Game, Perishable*, and is hung up on a stag's antlers on the wall to keep till Sunday. He bides his time to accomplish the perfect locked-room murder.

When the Laird is alone Dakobra pushes aside the sealing-wax and hisses, " Ardluck, you're for it." Unfortunately, the Laird is laughing so heartily at one of the cartoons in Argosy that he fails to hear. Dakobra shoots, but hits Argosy instead of the Laird; the bullet sticks at page seventy-eight. With a shout of triumph Aunt Tabitha leaps off the desk where she has been lurking, disguised as a parcel of mineral samples, and collars her man: she is really a colonel in the Special Branch. Dakobra is dispatched to London by registered post, but he escapes at the sorting-office, ready for the next duel of wits.

Ardluck mounts the copy of Argosy containing the bullet and uses it as a paper-weight. Jock the postman comments, " Yon was a fell unchancy shot. Noo hoo'll we ken the crossword solutions? "

Rhys Davies, born in Wales in 1903, was brought up to the sound of the ancient Welsh language, but educated in an English-speaking school. He spent his first twenty years in the historic Rhondda Valley. He has written several novels and collections of short stories, among others *The Red Hills*, *Under the Rose*, *Love Provoked*, *A Finger in Every Pie*, and a popular handbook on Welsh history, *My Wales*. A new novel of his will be appearing shortly. Few contemporary authors write with the extraordinary

richness of Davies, who can handle sombre tragedy or crusted Welsh comedy with equal power. *All Through the Night*, his new story, is a splendid and characteristic example of his work.

Oliver Moxon was born in the Argentine thirty-four years ago. After a varied early life, which is graphically described in his best-known book, *Bitter Monsoon*, he joined the R.A.F. as a fighter pilot and served first in England, then in the Far East. After the war he went into publishing, with writing as a side-line; switched to writing full-time, recently produced *Last Monsoon*.

Arthur Gordon, whose new hair-raiser of goings-on down on the Gulf Coast we print on page 66, says he started writing short stories at a time when he was reading unsolicited poems for *Good Housekeeping* at the rate of about 100,000 a year. We recommend *Danger Money* as really tough stuff.

Molly Bennett is the daughter of a clergyman who sent her to an art school for some years, with negative results, she says. She rapidly discovered in herself a bent for writing children's books, and has sold fifteen. Then she turned to adult stories.

This issue of Argosy contains another hit on the bull's-eye by **Victor Canning**, a delightful new domestic incident by **John Inglis Hall** (remember Mabel Grote?), and another arresting episode in the Petrella saga.

JOHN SILVER

FALL OF A SPARROW

With amazing swiftness
he swung his rifle up and fired

BY VICTOR CANNING

THERE were three of them sitting on top of the stable roof. From the plane tree to the side of the courtyard came the sound of others, chirruping and arguing noisily. Sparrows, thought Mr. Marcus Urwin, noisy, drab, greedy—and too many of them.

He leaned back more comfortably in his deck-chair and settled the air-rifle firmly against his shoulder. Along the line of sight he could see the three, and the pink evening sky beyond them. The light was going and it would be a difficult shot. But not too difficult for him. Nothing was too difficult if you trained yourself to meet it. He held the middle one of the sparrows in the sights, correcting automatically for the slight evening breeze and distance, and then fired.

Two birds flew up. One fell, slithering and fluttering down the red tiles and out of sight into the courtyard.

The large ginger cat sitting on the grass by his side made a faint noise that could have been approval or disdain. He reached down and fondled her, his fingers sliding under the collar she wore, and scratching at her soft pelt.

"There you are, Kali," he said gently. "One dead, but the other two live. In a moment they'll be back. Sparrows and people, Kali—they have short memories."

He sat there, waiting for the sparrows to return; a large, full-faced man with a faint tonsure of pale hair ringing his baldness, comfortable in loose country tweeds, looking jovial and easy-going . . . Looking, in fact, everything he was not.

The only true emotion he showed was the cold, cruel pleasure that touched his moist eyes for a moment as he saw two more sparrows settle on the roof. The air-rifle came up again. To which should death come, he mused; to the one on the right or the left?

Like a god he held back his decision until the last moment.

Death was his gift and in his fifty years he had always been generous with it. Death answered no questions, and gave no descriptions.

He fired and the sparrow on the left fell, a pathetic flurry of feathers sliding down the roof.

He looked down at the cat. "Twenty-seven today, Kali. And not killed, as you do, to eat, stupid, but for pleasure."

Kali arched her back and, offended, stalked off. As Marcus laughed to himself a long shadow fell across the grass in front of him. He looked round and saw his wife.

"You've been three hours out here. How can you sit so still?"

"You are always nervous on these days. You should find a release, as I do."

"Sparrows!" There was an edge of irritation on her voice. "Why can't you leave them alone?" She walked round the chair and stood before him. "Is everything all right for tonight?"

"Everything," he said gently, and there was a great satisfaction in his tone. She was a beautiful woman; tall, with hair darker than all evil . . . a splendid goddess. There was fire in her, and cruelty, too, that could match his own when she roused herself.

"Everything, my dear," he repeated. "We leave in an hour and we shall reach town when it is dark. The car I stole this morning is in the courtyard. You will follow half an hour after me and pick me up at the car park."

Over her shoulder, as he spoke, he saw a sparrow perch on the roof ridge and, with a swiftness that was amazing in so big a man, he swung his rifle up and fired.

"Marcus—you damned fool!" She jumped aside, angry and alarmed as the shot whistled by her. But he laughed as the sparrow fell. Rising, he took her arm and squeezed it. Rubbing his face against hers, he said, "Name something that money can buy . . . and tomorrow you shall have it."

He drove to the town, fifty miles away, with no emotion except a cold, calculated resolution. No profit came without work, and he worked. The jeweller's shop was in a turning off the main street, and he knew that on the second Thursday of every month the jeweller stayed late in his shop, the doors locked, going over his stock and making up his books. Yes, he knew this, but he had to plan the job—to work for it. A hundred other jobs in the past had meant work . . . and profit. And in his work he admitted only two partners—his wife, and death. The

jeweller would die tonight. But Marcus had no emotion about it.

There were still a few people and cars in the main street. He preferred it that way. He turned into the side street and drew up over the road from the jeweller's shop. A half curtain was drawn across the door and a light showed over the top of it.

Marcus sat for a moment behind the wheel and tugged his gloves on tighter. A man would have been a fool to steal a car and leave prints all over it. He pulled his coat collar up and dropped his hat a little lower over his eyes. Then he got out of the car and walked across to the shop door.

Urgently he rapped on the glass. A door opened at the back of the shop and he saw the jeweller standing there, a thin man in shirtsleeves and waistcoat, a yellow eyeshade giving him the appearance of a scraggy duck.

Marcus rapped again, and when the man came to the door he stepped back from it and gestured with his right hand upwards and outwards, as if he were pointing to something above the shop. The jeweller stared at him, puzzled. Marcus gestured urgently again. Coming back to the door, he saw the man looking stupidly past him into the street. Then a hand went up and the door opened a few inches on a chain.

"What is it?"

"Quick, man!" cried Marcus. "Get upstairs. There's a fire over your shop. I saw flames from the road."

It worked. It always did. The chain came off the door and Marcus pressed in, kicking the door closed behind him.

"Where's the phone?" he asked. "I'll call the Fire Brigade."

He was a foot behind the jeweller, who was hurrying towards the back of the shop. The man never answered him; Marcus never intended that he should. His hand came out of his coat pocket and a short, rubber-coated bar smashed down on the jeweller's head.

The man went to the ground without a sound.

Marcus calmly pulled a small sack from the inside pocket of his coat. He spent the next fifteen minutes quietly and methodically filling it. He worked expertly. There was no point in taking stuff that would be a nuisance. He found the key of the safe on the jeweller and cleared what cash there was in it.

Five minutes later he was driving into the car park. Almost at once his wife drew up alongside him, and he moved into her car. They drove off into the country. It was not until they were well out on the fifty-mile drive home that she spoke. "Well?"

"No trouble."

"Did you kill him?" He could hear the breathlessness in

her voice, the deep, vicarious satisfaction, and he smiled to himself. He had picked right when he had chosen her.

"I hope so. But one can never be sure. That is why one must always wear gloves, why the car should be stolen. But—even if he lives—what man, told that his place is on fire, stops to fix a description in his mind?" He chuckled. "And a bald man's best disguise is a hat."

He reached out and put his hand on her neck, squeezing it and laughing, and in the darkness the sound was obscene.

It was just before lunch the next day, and Marcus was sitting in the garden, the morning papers around him, a drink on the table at his side. His wife was away, taking the jeweller's stuff with her, and would not be back until the evening.

A car came up the drive and drew in alongside the wall of the stable courtyard. It was an ordinary, rather dusty saloon. Two men got out; two men in creased grey suits. For a moment they stood by the car, looking round.

They came over to him, one short and the other tall. The tall one had a long, deep-cut face and a fixed twist to his mouth, as though life tasted unpleasant to him.

The tall man said, "Mr. Marcus Urwin?"

"Yes. That's me." There was no anxiety in him, just curiosity. Nothing could touch him.

The tall man glanced down at the air-rifle on the grass by Marcus's side. "You like shooting?"

"I take a pot at the sparrows now and then. They spoil the fruit buds."

"Yes. A nuisance. You ought to keep a cat."

"I do." Marcus smiled. There was always this gambit, this moment of chat before a salesman made his pitch.

"I know," said the tall man. "Name of Kali?"

"Why, yes . . .". Marcus sat forward.

"I thought so. Do any shooting yesterday?"

"Yes." Marcus stood up. "Look, what is all this about? What do you want here?"

The tall man smiled, but it was not intended to put Marcus at his ease. "What's it all about? Well—" he hesitated, as though it were important, very important, to get his words right—"well, Mr. Urwin, I suppose you could say that it was about the fall of a sparrow."

"Biblical," said the short man, speaking for the first time.

"And not out of place, at that," said the tall man. "You see, Mr. Urwin, yesterday you shot some sparrows, and one of them, in falling, fluttered into the back of a car, a car that a

jeweller—who is lucky to be alive—noted the number of, when a man called on him."

"I don't see what all this has to do with me." Marcus had hold of himself now.

"No?" said the short man. "Well, maybe it wouldn't have anything to do with you, except for a ginger cat. The cat saw the sparrow flutter in through the back window of a stolen car, and jumped after it, Mr. Urwin."

From behind his back he brought out a thin leather collar with a medallion on it.

"A pity," the tall man said, "that you didn't look into the back of the car when you set out. Your cat got its collar caught up by the inside door handle when it jumped in. Strangled itself in its struggles. But from this little medallion we knew where to find the owner. Yes, I suppose in a way you could call it a pity.

"About the cat, I mean."

★ ★ ★

HOW'S THAT?

Or, indeed, is that so at all? If you can score a total of 18 points from our questions, count it as a good innings. If only so-so or out for a duck, turn to page 96.

1. *"Save the Cricket on the hearth." Who said this? (He didn't really want to save it.)*

2. *Can you name two games that start with a face-off?*

3. *What creatures are credited with:*
   a. being able to digest iron
   b. singing most sweetly just before their death
   c. weeping over the prey they are devouring

4. *Can you identify the speakers of the following stirring lines:*
   a. "Shoot if you must this old grey head"
   b. "Let us bang those dogs of Seville, the children of the devil"

5. *Cheddar, Stilton, and Cheshire are three well-known British cheeses. Can you name three more?*

6. *What does an undergraduate do when he "sports his oak?"*

7. *Who was the Old Man of the Mountains?*

8. *Can you identify: a. a Roman nose; b. a Grecian nose; c. a parson's (or pope's) nose; d. dog's nose*

★ FLYING STARTERS ★

Competitors were asked to supply the opening two sentences from an imaginary story, and we had a record entry ranging from horror to mystery and from comedy to downright goonery. There was also a small but select batch of the kind of story-opening we most dislike—*He was a happy person, in his humdrum, insignificant way . . .* and *Peters called the club waiter to bring another whisky and began his story . . .*

It was excitement that we were after, the sort of flying start that keeps a reader turning the pages with his eyes bulging, and we therefore discounted mere comedy, and also entries that told the whole story, such as *The stranger looked at her, and she knew that before the night was old he would achieve what she saw in that look. Now it was morning; she no longer owned the Bayonne diamonds, and she had no regrets.*

Our first prize is divided. A guinea goes to Iain Crawford, Auchterarder, Perthshire, for *Night oozed seamily across the garbage-bestrewn yard. He opened the lid of the dustbin and looked out.*

Our next guinea goes to David Platt, Rotherham, Yorkshire, for *" If only I could find that damned switch," he muttered, sliding his large hand round the insulator. Kilowatts are unpleasant playmates when they are naked in the dark.*

Second prize of half a guinea goes to Mrs. D. Mason, Albury, Surrey, for *" Dead men tell no tales," Reece thought. He hadn't reckoned that a dead woman would go on talking.*

Honourable mention to D. R. Wilkinson's:

" What on earth are you doing in my bath," screamed the Colonel, " and playing with my pink plastic duck? "

" I'm from the Ministry," she said.

We had such a stack of entries for this competition that, in order not to waste readers' talent for thinking up dramatic situations, we have invented a new version of an old parlour game, which we've christened Argostrips.

We are inviting readers to carry on the story and write a continuation for any one of the three winning entries, the object being to leave the hero in a really nasty predicament. Two sentences only, please, in block letters on a postcard, addressed to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London E.C.4, by June 10. Two guineas will go to the liveliest entry.

RIDE LIKE MAD

Sod and grass and daisy buds
cascaded in their wake

BY MOLLY BENNETT

THE boy stood staring at the steam from the freshly carted horse-dung rising into the chilly morning air. His nose dripped and he wiped a hard wool sleeve across it.

Behind him was the South Forest Riding-School; stabling, outbuildings and the paddock of trampled brown in front; the greening white railings and the row of horses' and ponies' heads hanging over their stable doors sniffing in the spring air.

Small-built, about fifteen, with dark colouring and a rather pointed whitish face, he stood there lost in a daydream and getting his breath back after wheeling a barrow of odour over the spongy ground.

Brian was a typical country lad, uncouth, uncommunicative except with his own kind, almost stupid at times and yet sensitive. Perhaps he was more sensitive than most.

" Get a move on, lad! "

Captain Horsham's shout made him jump to action. The Captain was one of his bosses. The boy streaked a bit of manure from his thumbnail down his jersey front and then he gave his trousers a hitch and, picking up the barrow handles in young calloused hands, slouched back to the paddock. Every step in the cracked wellingtons gave the impression that he was pulling his feet out of very deep mud.

He shambled up to the gingery little Captain who stood fidgeting in his shiny riding boots, dropped his barrow handles, and stood gazing at him dumbly.

Horsham drew his thin lips a little thinner. The tiny repressed moustache on the upper lip stood out like a strip of fawn plush. The boy exasperated him with his peasant stupidity, and if he had not been such cheap and willing labour he would not have lasted a minute. Sometimes he seemed worse than when he began working at the stables three months before.

" I thought I told you to saddle my horse," he said with a shuddering patience. At times something resembling pity darted over him for this clod of a boy.

"I furgot." Brian's tongue grew slower and his brown eyes more prominent when he was being grumbled at.

"Well, go and do it at once." The Captain patted his leg with his crop and congratulated himself on his control. He could have done the job quicker himself, but that was not his way; an order was an order.

The boy left the barrow just where it was and made for the stables, only to be pulled up sharply, called back, and told to move the smelly object to one side. Some of the patrons did not like to be reminded more than necessary of the horse's other end.

"The bludy singsong," the boy's mind muttered. The Captain's voice, and Miss Horsham's, and the voices of the majority of the pupils and others who used the riding-school all had the same accent and at home, suddenly vocal, he gave character sketches of them, usually well garnished. They sent his family into fits, and exaggerated high tones were tossed about between his younger brothers and sisters for hours most evenings.

He pulled the stable door open with a feeling of relief for he was always happier in the strawy dimness with the horses.

With them he lost that crushing inferiority; they were comrades. He worked so uncomplainingly that he sometimes felt that he, too, was ridden up and down the hard little Sussex roadways.

The jigging sorrel was saddled and bridled, with surprising gentleness, considering no one was watching.

"There now," his mind muttered again, "taake old bludy a ride and chuck 'im orf." And then he pushed the door open and led the mare out into the sunshine.

The Captain readjusted the buckles with quick, skilled, rebuking fingers, mounted lightly, if a little stiffly, and sat straight and correct, as became an instructor. He trotted the mare out of the paddock and on to the lane, and turned in the direction of the village for she was raw and needed plenty of traffic.

Brian spat.

His other boss, Miss Horsham, the Captain's sister, was grooming. Thin, fiery-faced, and large-boned, she was a good forty—some ten years older than her brother. She called out to the boy from the open stable door, "Don't just stand about, Brian! Get on and groom the boarder."

She straightened up, wiping wispy brown hair out of her eyes and wishing she were twenty years younger, for stooping made the blood deluge into her head. The veins on her neck stood out like bell cord and her eyes had a reddish hound look.

"Have you moved the muck?" He nodded

She slipped her hand from the webbing of the body-brush and threw it. " Well, get on with Firefly then."

He caught it with clumsy effort, almost losing a boot, and then he went into the stable at the far end of the line and pushed his way in past the big-headed skewbald gelding.

Even in the stable the startling colour of the horse shone out: great tan patches on the raw white coat. With his very long mane and tail, he had a free and independent look. He had been brought in to board three days before.

At the school there were several hacks—rubber-lipped, rather depressed-looking brown horses—the Captain's new mare, Miss Horsham's grey, and one or two ponies. None of these had touched the boy's imagination and he had never particularly wanted to ride, but when the skewbald came, with his big head and wild eye and blazing colour, he had altered Brian's attitude in a flash. Every time the boy looked at him he saw hedges rushing up to be conquered, and short, lucent grass speeding below as he rode the painted horse.

The dream of riding him was never out of his head for long; it hovered, just outside his workaday thoughts, waiting until a second's relaxation let it fly in again. The Captain had hinted at riding-lessons when Brian started at the stables, but it had never been mentioned again. The boy ran his hand over the skewbald's ribs; they rose barrel-like under his touch.

He grinned in the dimness and, with a quick look outside to see if the coast was clear, swung up onto the animal's bare back.

" Gor blimey! " he mouthed, as the horse backed and humped a bit, and he fell and rolled in some wet, but he was quite happy. The fleeting feel of the animal beneath him would last him all day, as it had done the day before. He could not imagine any of the other horses feeling like that.

The boy sat on an upturned bucket and chewed his bread-and-jam. He offered a crumb to the skewbald, but the fastidious whiskered lips quivered over his palm and passed on. The horse nuzzled his hair. He was quite tame really, but not used to being fooled about with in the stable. His rolling eye belied him.

The country sounds were sent flying as an ochre station-wagon rolled into the paddock. The next customers had arrived. Brian peeped out like an animal at the young man and woman. His ears were full of their chat and laughter, and he stayed close where he was while Miss Horsham brought out the two saddled horses. They mounted with care and plenty of fuss, walked out of the paddock, talking loudly, and turned up the road, away from the village, towards the open country.

The madly-coloured horse pushed the boy and stopped his gaping at the departing backs, the rounded rumps of the horses, and their black, swinging tails. He rubbed the jerking, impatient head. Firefly had had his exercise early, but his stout legs shuddered to be off again, away past the plodders.

The boy sighed and went out of the stable; he left the horse shining like metal.

When he came back from his dinner he found several riders assembling in the paddock, some on their own mounts and some on the school's. He stopped, at a loss.

" Coo-er! " A tremor stirred his stomach. " It's the day they go to the pub! "

Every so often brother and sister arranged a ride round the countryside with their pupils and any other riders who cared to join them. They made a circular tour and took in a little public house, The Sleeping Ploughman at Whiteham, which was kept by a distant cousin. It took them three or four hours, going as they pleased, and today was the day. Brian had forgotten all about it.

He began to panic, and his palms were suddenly wet, for he should have gulped down his meal and been back half an hour earlier today. In the afternoons, Sally, a big-seated blonde, helped in return for tuition, but she was off with flu. As it was, he was too late to do anything.

The riders ignored him; he could have been a dog pushing his way between them. " Jolly goods " and " My dears " flooded into his empty ears as he sidled up to the Captain, more for protection than work, but Captain Horsham's eyes stared like glass ones. He was talking to Lady Ketaford, a brown old withered crab of a woman, and he never even saw the boy.

But his sister did. She had been rushing and her lunch was wedged in her flat chest like a brick. She glared. " Good God, boy, where have you been? " She spoke softly and viciously through her large teeth, and she looked so strange that the boy was momentarily fascinated.

" I furgot."

She could have laid hands on him. " Well, you'll be in charge while we're away and don't you dare leave the place."

He nodded, staring at two straws stuck together and blowing along.

" The boarder and the Exmoor will be left and there's nothing to do. That should suit you."

The straws were now on a gentleman's boot; they hung down when he mounted.

" If anyone calls or rings up, write down *all* they say."

He nodded, wriggling his toes in his sweaty wellingtons.

He watched them go, heading towards the village; they would return the other way. He scratched his head, for having nothing to do left him at a loss.

The sky was clear blue with some birds going across it and he lifted his head like a dog and sniffed. Turning, his head still up, he watched the freckling of black rooks and when he looked back again he gazed right into the eyes of the skewbald.

He went over to him, kicking a ball of gingery dung out of his way in a lighthearted manner. With the ceasing of the hoofbeats on the road he felt free.

"Wotcher, beauty," he said loudly. Firefly put his ears forward and stamped. The boy went out of the paddock and gathered a fistful of dark wet grass from the shelter of the fence, and the smell of it in the skewbald's mouth was perfume fitting the hour. He opened the stable door and, putting a halter on the gaudy creature, led him out.

There he stood, a painted statue of a horse, calm and confident and friendly and yet, for all that, wild and free. The boy's heart swelled up suddenly.

"Yer old bludy," he said. "Yer old bludy!"

An eagle look swept over the horse's face and he surged forward.

"Them and their singsong and their fancies. All staarched up. Bludy can't ride. Bludy never ridden—not *ridden.*"

Again his dream filled his head.

He went and got the gelding's saddle and snaffle-bridle from the harness shed; the horse waited, statuesque and expectant.

It was only a moment's job to slide the new coffee-coloured saddle over the wide, strong back and bridle him. Brian spat on his hands and leapt up like a monkey. The stirrups hung inches below his dangling feet; he scrambled down again, shortened them uncertainly, and then got back; and all the time the gelding stood, quiet and almost thoughtful, as if the whole thing were prearranged between them.

The boy gathered up the reins; they felt entirely different from when he led a horse; and the pull of the head was amazingly strong. He held them tighter.

"Git up!" He kicked and pushed his body backwards and forwards. The skewbald marched out of the paddock solidly and safely and his ample white-pink hoofs met the quiet little road with a resounding hollow sound. Brian pulled the creature's head round with all the strength of his bony, unwashed wrists and the skewbald, head on chest, took the direction good-naturedly. He turned towards the open country.

A few near-finished, dirty sulphur-coloured catkins swung overhead and moss crawled brightly on the rich brown twigs.

Brian hitched himself forward. Why, there was nothing in it, this riding lark. It was as easy as biking; it was as splendid as he had known it would be on Firefly.

He kicked the sides of his mount, but it did not make him alter his walk. He kicked harder. "Git up!"

The animal quickened his pace, but still walked. They were passing under an old split willow and the boy snatched off a supple shoot. He ran his hand down it, pushing off the buds, and then laid it on the painted horse's shoulder.

The next moment he was rolling in the road, with the horse, slowing up, some way ahead. He got up and dusted his backside with a silly grimacing grin at the trees and ran up the road in his slopping wellingtons.

"Whoa, whoa!"

The skewbald turned his head, eyed him sadly, and suffered him to scramble on again. The boy gripped the reins tighter than ever, drummed his heels on the shining sides and tried tickling the creature's rump with his switch, which he had managed to keep.

The skewbald danced a bit, quite consciously, and then set off at a clattering trot, a comfortable one, for he seemed as anxious as his rider for no more spills.

Up and down. It came to the boy as naturally as flying to a fledgling. Up and down. One moment an inch or so over the shiny saddle, and then his bony seat met it gently; as gently as if it were cotton wool.

He was grinning, showing his overlapping front teeth and plenty of near-white gum, and then he laughed out loud and whistled. The distant line of bare woods, looking like a giant bank of thyme, danced a purple-green jig. Daringly he kicked one foot from the stirrup, slid his hand into his boot, and scratched his leg. He could not find the iron again and so his leg hung, knocking against it.

Through the trees ahead he saw a blue beetle advance, dragging a twig. He pulled on the reins with all his strength. Firefly unwillingly slowed and suddenly put his head right down and blew. The reins ran through Brian's fingers and for a moment he had a headless horse, but somehow he got him to the side as the tractor came snarling at them with its attendant tree-trunk gay with lichen, swaying behind.

"Up in the world today then!" The lad driving pulled a face: his beret was angled half an inch from his eyebrows.

Brian grinned sheepishly and said nothing.

" See you tonight with the bike."

Brian never heard him. " Git up! " He quickened the pace again without much trouble for he was learning fast.

Farther along the skipping grey road was a gate, a dirty five-barred gate that enclosed a great vigorous field. Beyond its distant hedge the ground was rough, and spoilt with thistles, and sloped down to a watery little valley. The boy worked the horse up alongside the gate. He swung it open and urged him through and, being a country lad, shut it after him.

" Coo! " He gazed enraptured at the soft, brilliant turf, and then he brought his eyes in to the massive white shoulders below him; he could see the sugar-pink flesh staring back at him where some hair twirled round.

He manœuvred the horse back to the gate with its rump almost on the woodwork. He was like a jockey at the start of a race. He was at the start of a race.

Behind, the thyme woods watched.

He grasped the reins with hot, wet hands; he wound them round his hands and snuggled his rubbered feet as far as they would go into the stirrups and then with a yell he laid on the willow.

The skewbald jumped into motion: long, raking strides in a moment, like a wild horse; a stretched gallop with sod and grass and daisy buds cascading in their wake.

At first, in a flashing delicious terror, the boy shut his eyes and wept a bit, and then he blinked and, crouching, peered through the streaming grey-white mane.

" It's dead easy," he shouted. He was up in the stirrups now, as to the manner born. The terror went and he shouted, urging and urging, and the horse laid back his white ears and responded.

Then the bottom hedge jumped towards them. The boy had forgotten it and his mouth dropped into a great loose O of horror, but the gelding flew on, and suddenly the terrified boy saw a tangle of sprouting, thorny green below.

The mad horse had taken wing.

Then there was an impact that made him bite his tongue and fall forward like a half-filled sack, but he stayed on somehow and they went charging through the tall dun grasses and great dead thistles. The pounding hoofs beat the long, cruel brambles into the earth and missed the gaping rabbit-holes by a miracle.

He was holding on to the mane, for the reins were flying anywhere; one foot was out of the stirrup and the wind blew a gale in his ears.

" Gor blimey! " His lips gave birth to a sick smile; the hedge had shaken him and he had no inside.

But, as they rolled safely down into the valley, fear faded again and he caught the reins and found his stirrup. Then he snatched sharp glances to left and right. Not a soul on the land; he was in luck.

He laid on again with the willow and they thundered on down into the lush valley like a cavalry charge, wet earth plopping behind them. Foam on his leg made caution come to the boy for the first time on his mad escapade. He dragged his mount to a halt with difficulty, slid to the ground, and looked him over. He was all right.

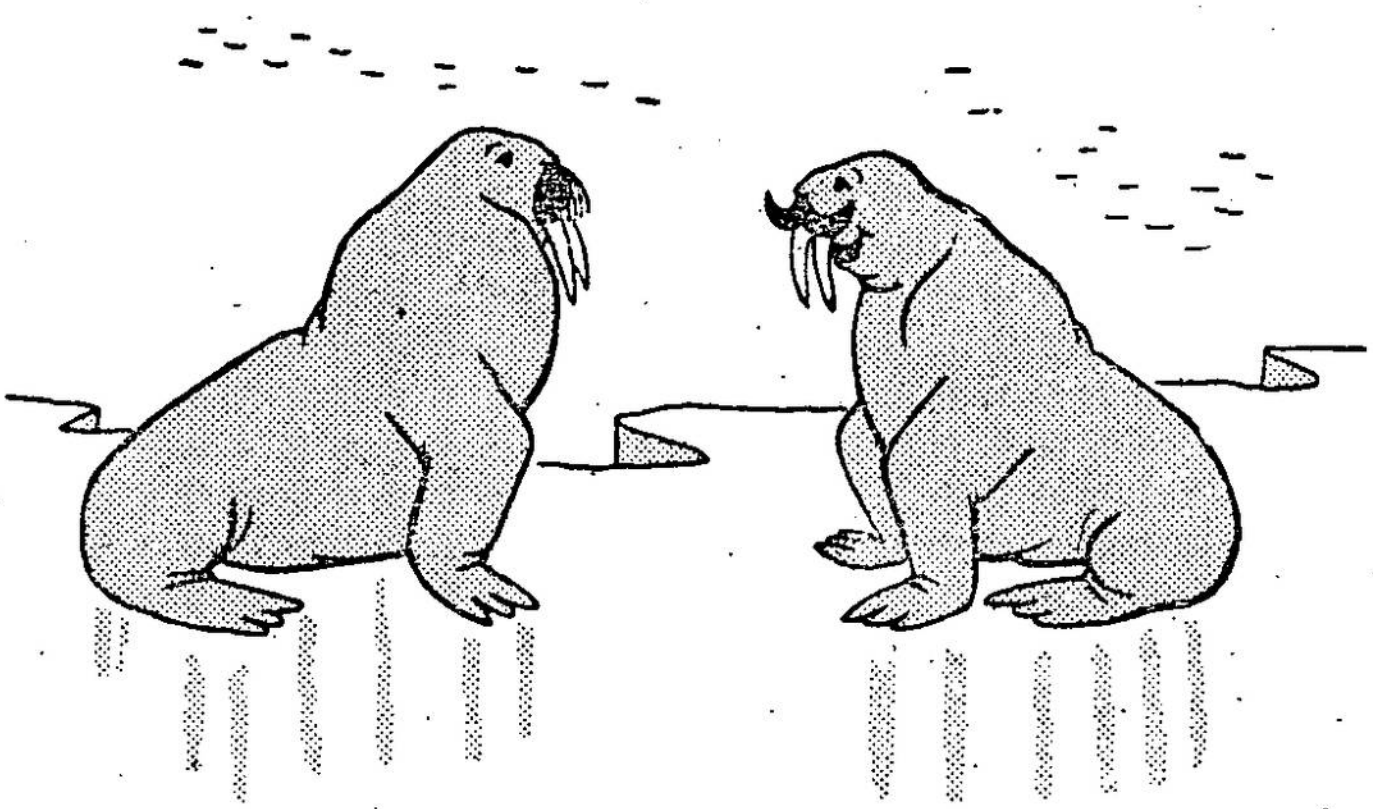
" But 'e's steaming like a pudden," he said. " Better not get on agin."

The painted horse became as delicate as china. A dry old leaf might lame him, a stumble send him into a heap of shattered bits. On thrilling, trembling legs, the boy led him back up the slope, found a gate, and returned across the field of their mad flight. Back down the road, with the thyme trees still and sober now . . .

They all returned at five. Brian, putting the finishing touches to the gelding, saw them swinging to the ground, fat behinds and thin in breeches and well-fleshed ribs surging against tight jackets.

A small woman shouted across to the Captain, " *What* a ride! "

The boy buried his face in the skewbald's neck and wept with laughter.



" I waxed it! "

★ *From a Chief Engineer comes this vivid, authentic, cruel-sea incident, told with the true tang of danger and that characteristic resilient humour which spells victory in every crisis.*

This brief wartime adventure was awarded First Prize in the recent Seafarers' Education Service Short Story Competition, judged by Argosy.

SURVIVOR'S LEAVE

BY WILLIAM H. VENABLES

FIRING a boiler with coal is one of the toughest jobs on earth. Perhaps nowhere else in industry have the effects of mechanization eased the life of the labourer more than in the stokehold of a steamer. Nowadays, boilers are fired by pressurized oil sprayed through a needle-sized orifice; and the fireman's main job is to keep the orifice clean by poking it with a wire every few hours.

How different the fireman's task on a coal-fired steamer—many of which still belch their smoky pennants across the oceans of the world.

A special breed of men evolved who could face the searing heat of an open furnace and distribute huge shovelfuls of coal with mathematical precision across the glowing bars. Most of these men at one time lived in Liverpool, and were the sons of men who once fired the great Cunarders and White Star liners. This fast-dying breed have their own catarrhal twang and whimsicalities of speech; a typical mode of ambulation—called the Western-Ocean roll—which consists of short, rapid steps, and a peculiar flexibility of the hips which gives more evidence of agility than the toughness that is their greatest virtue.

Such were the pair who, having dined on a timid cup of tea and soggy Nelson cake in Sugden's Cocoa Rooms, trapesed down Miller's Bridge towards the Liverpool docks. Each pulled a half-smoked " nicker " from an inside pocket, lit it, and inhaled with relish.

It was the second year of the war, and both had, a week before, been granted thirty days' survivor's leave after the sinking of the meatship *Cowhide*.

Apart from being obviously " Liverpool firemen," the two

were conspicuous for their incongruity. The larger, Charlie Curtiss, was six feet one and of massive stature. His benign and rubicund features would have looked well over a clerical collar. His companion, " Spadger " Hollins, barely reached his shoulder and as he tripped beside him with mincing gait, his alert little face, dominated by darting blue eyes, gave an impression of birdlike inquisitiveness—indeed, a suggestion of the cocky sparrow from which he derived his nickname.

" Look 'ere, Curtiss," began Spadger—it was typical of the status between the two that he never used Charlie's Christian name unless he was particularly pleased with him—" look 'ere, I'm bloomin' well fed up with this 'ere survivor's leave. Feedin' on wet Nellies at the Coaks—gah! An' the price they charges fer fags, crikey! "

Charlie grunted his complete agreement.

" I votes we goes down ter the *Marsupian* an' sees the Sec," decided Spadger. " The Sec's a right good scouser. 'Im what was in the *Mardinian* wi' us, 'member? "

Charlie nodded his becapped head and mumbled to indicate that his memory was still as good as ever.

Thus it was that, some twenty minutes later, the pair boarded the freighter *Marsupian* in Alexandra Dock and ambushed Mr. Henry Fotheringham, her Second Engineer. Mr. Fotheringham, wearily climbing the engine-room ladder in a sweat-soaked boiler-suit, regarded them both with distaste.

" Mornin', Sec," beamed Spadger, touching a coal-scarred finger to his cap. " Any jobs goin'? "

Mr. Fotheringham, gaining time to analyse the problem presented, leaned against a burnished handrail, took out his tobacco box, and rolled his thoughts into a cigarette. It was indeed a problem.

When on shore-leave in foreign ports Hollins and Curtiss were notorious for their ability to nose out the most potent local plonk and imbibe same to more than capacity. Hollins usually started a fight and Curtiss went to gaol with him. Apart from this serious and oft-recurring delinquency, the Second Engineer knew no two men more capable of keeping the steam on the blood with less smoke from the funnel.

With this pair in the stokehold the *Marsupian* would have at least eight hours a day without incurring the wrath of an irate Commodore of Convoys whose main delight seemed to be the chastising of smoking steamers. That decided him.

" O.K.," he grunted with a scowl. " Sign on ten in the mornin'. Shipping office."

" Ta, Sec," fawned Spadger. " Yer a toff."

Forty-eight hours later the *Marsupian* was one of twenty grey-clad merchantmen waddling down the Mersey Channel line-in-line like a herd of circus elephants. The convoy had been delayed twelve hours while the channel was swept for magnetic mines dropped by Jerry during the previous night's blitz.

Spadger and Charlie were on the Second's watch, the four-to-eight, as the *Marsupian* steamed towards the Bar. Her two boilers had three furnaces each, and of these Spadger tended the low fires and Charlie the high ones, which were a bit on the high side for Spadger.

As there were twice as many high fires as low ones this division of labour suited the pair admirably.

Stripped to the waist and glistening with sweat, Charlie was able to exercise his vast reserves of brute strength while Spadger sat on the bilge-valve casing and regaled him with advice and an occasional bawdy song.

Having just had an issue of duty-free cigarettes, Spadger was blissfully smoking, and titillating his salivary juices with extravagant visions of the meal that would be his at eight bells.

" Yer know, Char ole boy," mused Spadger, "this 'ere cook's a pie-faced, measly hunka meat, but I'll say this fer 'im, 'e can make a Irish stoo fit fer a king. Ay, yer wouldn' get better in the Savoy 'Otel."

Just then a husky youth emerged from a gloomy tunnel wheeling a barrow full of coal, one of the many he would have to fill and push before his four-hour watch was over.

" Shuv it over there, Alf," ordered Spadger, nodding imperiously towards a small pile of coal in front of one of the fires.

" First-tripper, eh? " ruminated Spadger as the trimmer trundled his barrow back into the bunkers. " Pore li'l bleeder. Wunner why 'is ma let 'im come ter sea. Tell yer what, Char, when yer've sliced that fire, 'ave a smoke an' then yer can give the pore kid a 'and in the bunkers, eh? "

" Sure, Spadge," grunted Charlie, ramming a nine-foot steel slice into the furnace, bending it as his weight loosened the fiery mass from the bars.

It was about then that the *Marsupian* steamed over a magnetic mine and, not being fitted with de-gaussing wires, her steel hull triggered off the mine's lethal mechanism. The explosion which followed blasted the bottom out of number two hold. Hatchboards and cargo screamed into the air in a holocaust of roaring smoke and flame.

On the bridge, Captain Hodgson, the mate, and the helmsman were thrown to the deck by the blast. Bruised and dazed, the

Captain staggered to the wheel and altered course to swing his sinking ship out of the line of convoy.

Down in the stokehold the terrific jolt flung Charlie Curtiss onto the butt of his slice, winding him with a heavy blow in the solar plexus. Slumping to the plates, he doubled up, groaning with pain.

Spadger Hollins, blissfully eulogizing the cook's flavoursome stew, suddenly found himself floundering in a heap of coal which seemed to have acquired urgent life of its own. For a moment he lay in a daze, every sense numbed by the explosion.

Gradually he became aware of aching limbs, and a head which throbbed like the best morning-after he had ever had. With a groan he staggered to his feet. The stokehold was in darkness except for the glow from the fires. He could hear the scream of escaping steam, and a prolonged rumble as the heaps of coal in the bunkers sought a common level.

With a cry of dismay Spadger limped across the already-listing stokehold and, with a strength belying his meagre frame, tried to force Charlie to his knees.

"Char, wake up! Get up, Char, we're sinkin'," he yelled, slapping Charlie's cheeks. "Oh, crikey, wake up, Char!"

Stumbling across the stokehold, Spadger turned on the sea-cock and filled a bucket with icy water. He flung it in Charlie's face, and swore with relief as Charlie, spluttering and holding his stomach, struggled to a sitting position.

"Cor lumme, me belly," moaned Charlie.

"Never mind yer flippin' belly," screamed Spadger. "We've gotta get out quick! We're sinkin'."

While Spadger was trying to heave Charlie to his feet, the Second Engineer stumbled into the stokehold. "Anyone hurt in here?" he called, flashing his torch on the two firemen. "The Old Man's ordered abandon ship. Up the ladder with you, quick! Where's the trimmer?"

"Crikey!" gasped Spadger, staring in consternation at the bunker tunnel. "Young Alf's trapped in the bunkers!"

By the light of the torch, Spadger and the Second Engineer peered along the steel tunnel leading into the bunker. The far end was blocked. Somewhere behind that wall of coal—if he wasn't already buried and smothered—young Alf, on his first day at sea, lay trapped in a sinking ship. For a moment they looked at each other in dismay. Already the stokehold plates were covered by sooty water which swished eerily about their feet.

While Charlie scrambled to his feet, all personal aches forgotten, Spadger grabbed a shovel and darted into the tunnel.

Frantically he attacked the sloping wall before him, flinging the coal behind him, where Charlie scooped it away to keep the tunnel clear. The Second Engineer focused his torch so that they could see.

As fast as Spadger excavated a sizeable hole, there came the clatter of slithering coal, and the hole was filled again. It was like trying to dig a hole in quicksand.

"It's no flippin' use," groaned Spadger, still attacking the dyke of coal. "'Ow much coal d'yer reckon there'll be, Sec?"

"Shouldn't be more than four or five feet thick," answered the Second. "But God knows how much has slid in from the wings. I'm afraid we'll have to leave the poor chap."

"Not bleedin' likely!" grunted Spadger, straightening from his shovel and wiping the sweat from his eyes. "'Ow about tunnellin', Sec?"

"Not a hope." The Second pursed his lips and shook his head dejectedly. "There's no time to rig props. This ship won't float much longer. Feel that?"

The ship suddenly lurched to starboard and a roaring torrent swirled about their knees. The rush of water increased and was too much for them. All three were swept from their feet. Then, miraculously it seemed, the settling vessel asserted her dignity and slowly rose to an even keel.

The three men scrambled to their feet, spluttering ashy water, heedless of cuts and bruises, fearful of the maelstrom of icy water which might at any instant pour down upon them from the smothering sea. Lit by the dim glow from the furnace fires, they stared at each other with frightened eyes, then, with one accord, they waded back into the tunnel.

"I've got it, Sec!" cried Spadger, his eyes wide with inspiration. "Charlie can 'old the trimmin'-plate above 'is 'ead, an' I can tunnel between 'is legs. You can do it, can't yer, Char ole man?"

"Er course," grunted Charlie.

"It's in the wing!" cried the Second, floundering to the port side and burying his face in the water as he went on all fours, feeling for the six-by-three trimming-plate. "Here it is."

He and Spadger carried the thin steel plate into the tunnel, and slid it over Charlie's back as he stooped, hands on knees. The diminutive Spadger scrambled between Charlie's legs and scooped shovelfuls of coal backwards with frantic haste. The Second shovelled the coal clear of the tunnel entrance.

Every few minutes it was found possible to force the steel plate farther into the wall of coal. Shovelful by shovelful Spadger burrowed his way forward towards the trapped trimmer.

Fortunately there was not a great height of coal above the tunnel entrance; even so, Charlie was grunting with strain before Spadger shouted out excitedly, " I think I'm through! "

A few minutes later, he called back, " Pass me the torch, Sec."

Spadger crawled through into the bunker space. The beam of the torch climbed over the hills of coal which rose against the ship's side to the deck-head; over the dust-blackened lake of water which had penetrated through strained seams from the sea. The light halted on the ashen face of the young trimmer—mercifully unconscious—as he lay slumped across a heap of coal, his lower body beneath the water.

With a shout of relief that the trimmer wasn't buried, Spadger waded through the water, hoisted Alf to his back, and struggled with him to the tunnel entrance, the torch jammed beneath an armpit to light the way.

Unceremoniously he dumped the unconscious trimmer beneath the arch of Charlie's legs so that the Second could pull him into the comparative safety of the stokehold.

Laying the trimmer on the bilge-valve casing above the surging water, the Second and Spadger were able to relieve the weight on the trimming-plate until Charlie could slip from beneath it. Charlie then swung Alf to his shoulder and climbed the stokehold ladder with him, the other two following, urging him to hurry.

On deck they found that the ship was sinking fast. The rest of her crew were safely in the boats. The Captain was just scrambling into a lifeboat when the four men arrived from below —Charlie carrying Alf like a sleeping babe.

" Good lord! " exclaimed the Captain, " I thought everyone had abandoned ship! "

" We can now, sir," grinned Mr. Fotheringham. " These two wouldn't leave until they'd dug the trimmer out of the bunkers."

" Good show! " congratulated Captain Hodgson. " I hope you both enjoy your survivor's leave."

" Survivor's leave," grunted Spadger Hollins, as he sat in the lifeboat and glumly watched the *Marsupian* sink until she bottomed on the channel with only her masts remaining above water. " Survivor's leave again! Flippin' heck, what a bleedin' war! "

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

OVERBURY AND DELLA

Marriages are funny things after a time

BY JOHN INGLIS HALL

WHEN Thomas Overbury waited on us at table—or indeed took part in anything to do with our family life—we were always enchanted by the ritual quality of his performance.

There was the way he pounced on the silver vegetable dishes when Grace, our parlourmaid, brought them in, and lifted their shining lids before he passed them to us, darting a glance into each as they stood on their heated stands. Afterwards he would replace the lids softly and delicately, then straighten his back, rock once or twice on his heels, and smile subtly to himself as though by a secret feat he had managed to avert some catastrophe.

There was his manner of leaving the dining-room. He would turn on his heel in military fashion as he neared the door and execute a curious little cross between an entrechat and a bow, directed towards my mother, whose place was at the end of the table nearest to him. In doing this he backed into the grandfather clock which stood to the right of the door, and since it was a temperamental beast, full of large lead weights, he generally stopped it, and I or someone else had to get up and start it again.

There was his scrupulous attention to anniversaries connected with the Boer War. On such days, he waited at table wearing his miniature campaign medals, and when he saw my father or mother for the first time in the morning, he would point to the medals and announce, proudly yet confidentially: "Mafeking Day today, sir," or "madam," or "Ladysmith," or whatever the anniversary might be.

He was in fact remarkably partial to anniversaries. When he had been with us for less than a year, I noticed one day in his pantry a calendar with all the household's birthdays ringed in red. On birthday mornings there was a card on one's plate at breakfast, with *T. Overbury respectfully wishes you many happy returns of the day* written on it in black ink in his elegant copybook hand.

Overbury came to us when I was fifteen years old, during

school term-time, at the end of a period when we had had a series of butlers too strange even for our household, immensely sympathetic though my mother and father were to odd behaviour of all kinds.

There had been Gapp, whose only interest during his short stay with us was boots and shoes. After a few days, the feet of the whole household glittered and shone, though many other things the care of which should have taken precedence over shoes and boots were completely neglected. He had a fitted suitcase of his own, containing only shoe-cleaning equipment.

Rogers, who followed him, held daily prayer meetings at which he forced the whole staff to kneel for a quarter of an hour on the cold stone kitchen floor, but nevertheless he had to be sent away after a distinctly pagan frolic with a kitchenmaid one Saturday night on an upper landing.

Trotter, our next, continually shifted the furniture in the servants' quarters, never quite satisfied with it, and finally while we were away for the weekend at Eastbourne, unexpectedly rearranged the furnishings of the whole second floor of our house without consulting anyone. Though Trotter and my mother parted, they parted friends. She might even have accepted his furniture-moving had it not disturbed the other servants, and had she not felt sure that one day he would start on my father's study, with consequences that were bound to be unsatisfactory.

I arrived home for the holidays, I recall, too large for my trousers, too large for my tweed sports coat, my long blue overcoat metamorphosed into a short, undignified little jacket. My mother met me in the hall of our white Regency house in Buckingham Terrace—now alas turned into Government offices—held me at arm's length, laughing, and said, "Darling, lunch, then new clothes, quickly. Your father would never forgive me if I let you walk about town for a single day looking like a giraffe with a skin a size too small."

We moved into the dining-room. Overbury, as soon as he had been introduced to me, carried out his mysterious search in the silver dishes and was dismissed by my mother, since we were alone for lunch. He bowed to her as he left the room, stopping the clock, which I started again when he had gone. He was a grey-haired man about sixty years old, and looked, with his black jacket and striped trousers, like a country solicitor's clerk, with the added formality and solemnity of a courting penguin. He walked with his toes turned out, his arms, like penguin flippers, held straight by his sides.

"Like him?" my mother asked. "When he does that thing

with the vegetable dishes, we think he expects that one day cook, instead of a cauliflower, will serve up the head of John the Baptist."

" How long have you had him? " I asked. " And does he move the furniture about? "

My mother shook her head, laughing. " No. Most of the things he does are ordinary enough, yet somehow he personally contrives to be unusual. He is very fond of Lola and has her in his bedroom to listen to his wireless in the evenings. He contends that cats are musical, particularly Siamese."

" I fancy I'll get on well with Overbury," I said.

My mother laughed again. " You will. Your father dotes on him already. In fact Overbury, did he but know it, has got us in the palm of his hand. Did you see his little dance in front of the clock? And you wait till you hear him on the Boer War! He won it, apparently, helped by Cracker, a mule, and General Redvers Buller."

We ate our lunch happily, went out into the city and, at leisure, dressed me.

I was perfectly right. I did get on well with Overbury. He became one of my close friends, somebody whose place in my affections soon ranked next only to that of my father and mother. He made me feel comfortable, because he sensed all my shynesses and embarrassments, and thus helped me to disregard them. In addition, he demonstrated in everything he said and did how what he called a " right man, a gentleman, a real man who is gentle to everyone " should behave.

As it happened, I never realized at the time that he was teaching me anything; it is only now, in retrospect, that I recognize it—and with what pleasure!

Overbury was one of the most charitable men I ever met, equalling even my father. It was not that he always gave alms, though he very soon became, with my father's consent, for the general run of beggars, scroungers, and street singers, the charitable conscience of the house. For him, as for my father, the wicked and the vicious did not exist. They were people, the product of their circumstances, whom life, for some reason, had defeated; hence their actions. They gave absolutely everyone the benefit of the doubt.

During dinner one day, I remember my father speaking with warmth about a woman friend of the family who had looked after a young, unmarried Irish maid who had had a child while in her service in London. She had discovered the girl's predicament, helped her with money and understanding, and kept her in work to support it. I could see pleasure at my father's attitude

reflected on Overbury's kind face as he poured the wine. An affectionate smile twinkled behind his eyes like a jewel. My father sensed it and said, looking up at him, " You approve, I see, Overbury."

Overbury was pleased that my father had sensed his feelings. " The act of a real lady, sir," he said quietly.

My father looked at him sharply—we were alone for dinner—and said, " Not Christian charity, Overbury? "

Overbury shook his head. " Charity plain would be better, sir."

" Are you an agnostic, too? " my father queried.

Overbury smiled non-committally. " Not necessarily, sir. But people other than Christians can be charitable."

It was after this incident that my father started to treat Overbury as a personal friend, and I knew that he would be with us for a long time. Within a year they began, late at night, when my father was working, to meet in his study.

Overbury would get up from his bed, often long after midnight, put on his blue woollen dressing-gown and slippers and go down to the kitchen, where he would make my father a pot of tea. When he brought it, he would place outside the study door, on the bottom step of the stairs, a spare cup and saucer, which he did not take in with him when he knocked.

My father told me that he always apologized for his attire, poured out the tea, then said good night, and prepared to go. On being asked to stay and have a cup of tea, Overbury would protest formally, then yield, and leave the room, to reappear twenty seconds later with his cup. They drank tea and ate digestive biscuits, then smoked a quiet pipe together and listened for half an hour to Mozart records on my father's gramophone. It was a pleasant thing for them both, two upright, sensitive, eccentric men, growing old, to do together in the middle of the night.

Part of the ceremony was that my father always said to him as he came in, " Now, Overbury, you know you shouldn't. A man of your age. You know you need your sleep."

Overbury would reply that it was purely selfish, and that he did it only because he wanted a cup of tea himself. In fact my father knew that Overbury invariably checked before he went to bed if he was likely to work late that night. Later, after he had retired, Overbury used to declare that he did it for the pipe, the music, and the society of a man whose company he loved and who needed a break from his labours.

" Ah, that dear man, your father, Mr. Jack," I remember Overbury saying to me once. " What a mind! What learning!

And he talks to me like a Professor, and expects me to answer—as if what I said mattered."

"But it does, Overbury," I said.

"That's a wonderful thought, sir. But I began too late to be a scholar, so I became a butler instead," he ended, on a slightly melancholy note.

This lack of learning was in fact the one thing that Overbury lamented deeply in himself. That he could rig my model yacht for me was good, but it was not learning—he had served as a crewman on board famous racing-yachts at Cowes between 1900 and 1910. That he could ride and look after a horse as well as most men of his age was a relic from the Boer War, and thus good, but it was not learning. That he could hum the parts for the various instruments in a great deal of Mozart's music, particularly the operas, was not learning either. That he was an expert in the colour breeding of Persian cats was what he called "something out of my old rag-bag," but it was not learning.

These and many other minor talents and branches of knowledge—like his playing of the harmonica, for example—were, according to him, just things he had picked up casually, grubbing alongside the track of living.

He could produce tips and an account of the going at current race-meetings for betting men, or a note about art exhibitions or concerts for the artistic or the musical, at a moment's notice. If anyone was foolish enough to think that Overbury's knowledge was superficial about any matter upon which he volunteered information, they received some rude shocks.

I remember his devastating analysis of the staying pedigree from St. Simon of a Derby entrant, given to a racehorse owner who questioned it over breakfast one Derby Day morning; and how the accuracy of his account of the whereabouts of the most famous of Breughel the Elder's pictures in Western Europe startled an art critic of some repute who happened to be staying with us.

It mattered to him deeply that he was regarded with affection and respect by ourselves at home, and that he was looked upon by our guests as a subtle observer of their tastes and ours; only this compensated a little for his lack of learning.

Not that he did not try to remedy what he called his ignorance. He used to sit in his bedroom with Lola our Siamese cat draped round his shoulders like a cape, reading, and polishing abstractedly with the flat of his thumb, slowly, over the hours, a cherished piece of my mother's Georgian silver, which, under his régime, glittered in its cases like a dragon's hoard.

I remember one day I went up to see him when I was preparing

an examination, about tactics in some ancient battle—the decline of the Macedonian phalanx interested him only fractionally less than his own experiences in Buller's Horse—and there on the table in front of him sat a pile of library books, Caesar and Catullus and Chaucer, Goldsmith and Gogol, Herrick and Hood and O. Henry. He had a curious trick of contracting the breadth of his face suddenly, without shaking his head, so that his reading-glasses slipped down his nose and fell into his lap.

"Now, Mr. Jack," he said, looking up at me and smiling by way of introduction.

His room had an endearing smell of its own—the faint bitterness of his pipe tobacco, mingled with the scent of flowers, without which he disliked living.

He talked for a time about the piece of silver he was polishing, its weight, elegance, and date, and how polishing with the thumb was going out with the decline of butlers and the rise of newfangled silver polishes.

"You know why your mother's silver is the finest in London? Because I'm on it all the time—like this, rub, rub, rub—enjoying it, enjoying the hidden work that's never noticed. Of course, Grace uses the polish as well, but it's this thumb," and he held it up in the air, "gives it the surface that nobody else's has." He paused and laughed at himself. "But now I'm boasting."

Then he turned to the book he was reading. "This Mr. Chaucer, sir—bright as a button after 600 years! No mealy mouth, Mr. Chaucer, and he judged nobody; just wrote them down plain, so clear that an old man like me can ride with the Prioress and the Pardoner to Canterbury any afternoon."

He closed the book quietly, as though he did not wish to bruise it, put it down, and waited for me to state my business. All authors, living or dead, were called Mr., Mrs., or Miss by Overbury, and curiously, in my mind these social titles remain with the authors of books. I think because of him, even now, of Mrs. Sappho, Dr. Goldsmith, Mr. Pater, Miss Eliot, Monsieur de Maupassant, and Herr Goethe. For he translated them, where appropriate, into foreign languages.

Overbury's marriage, however, is really the event in his life that I remember and cherish most, for it concerned another member of our household of whom I was equally fond, Della Carter. Della was an orphan who had come to my mother as a nursemaid, directly from the orphanage where she had been brought up. She had looked after us, a most bewildered shepherd, from the time I was four years old.

There was something at once moving and funny about Della. She was among the most mournful-looking human beings I ever

saw. Her eyes were slate-grey and a trifle crossed, and she wore thick glasses with gold rims. Her voice had querulous cadences which were heartbreaking, or would have been had we not known that she was happy. The world ran over her like a giant steam-roller, but it never squashed her flat, though this was clearly what she expected might happen.

From the orphanage, she had brought with her an elementary education, a terrible docility, and a sighing resignation, but also a wonderful system of bending authority to her wishes. Della first earned our respect because of the remarkable collection of rude songs which she used to sing, tunefully and innocently, to us in our baths. They remained secrets between us and we sang them ourselves only in the bath or outside in the park, far away from grown-ups. I still sing them in my bath sometimes, though they sound pretty harmless now.

When Overbury joined us, Della had been in our service some ten or eleven years. Her brown hair was beginning to turn grey and she had acquired, as she grew older, the solid calm and tranquillity of the safe and the loved. Her voice still had sometimes an orphanage quaver to it, but what she said had authority.

From the start, Overbury had treated her with great respect and slightly archaic formal courtesy. He judged her position in the household to a nicety, never once overstepping the bounds of what a new recruit, however exalted, should say or do in the presence of a triumphant veteran. He recognized that she was not a pretty woman; nobody could fail to. But he also understood clearly her entire non-conformity, her grimly unintentional jokes, and the fact that she was part of our lives, like the sunrise and the weather, noticed and accepted with simplicity.

Overbury told us nothing of his earlier marriage himself, though we soon knew that there had been one. My mother found out about it when he had been with us for about six months. I noticed that she was watching him very thoughtfully as he served at table one day, and when he left the room she said suddenly, " I've found out about Mrs. O."

My mother was not a gossip, but she loved magical tales. Warm-hearted and sympathetic, she had a fine descriptive talent and great enthusiasms. The consequence was that when she described anything, even the most trivial incidents and people became glitteringly alive and vivid. People became in her hands both what they were and what they were not. Without malice, she loved human activity and talked about it brilliantly, and by her brilliance changed its face.

She was not a gossip, poking about like a pig in a trough. A

fond lover of people, she described them humorously, shrewdly, and too well. If the truth very often eluded her, she had only passed it by somewhere on the road.

She paused for a moment. "Yes. I asked him today if he had ever married and whether he had any children," she said. "He replied solemnly, 'Alas yes, and alas no, madam,' then he told her how he had married what he described as 'the prettiest little baggage in the world, pretty as paint,' and how, without warning, she had left him, 'after six months of what I thought was happiness, madam.' He never heard from her again; all he knows is that she died and was buried in a cemetery at Acton."

"Never heard from her again, you say?" my father asked, knife and fork in hand.

My mother shook her head. "Never. And he never went to the police. He said he would rather not know the truth officially. He did know it, of course . . ."

I was silent. Such matters were at that time emotionally and in other ways beyond me.

Overbury managed his courtship of Della Carter somewhat as though it had been a dynastic marriage at an Italian Court in the fifteenth century. It was an impressive piece of formal ritual, with embassies first to my mother, then to my father, followed by discussions, exchanged gifts, and finally the splendid day when the affianced couple strolled arm-in-arm to Regent's Park one afternoon; an utterly entranced, bewildered, glowing Della wearing a rather fine garnet-and-diamond engagement ring, and a garnet brooch to match, the latter given to her by my mother.

They were not a young couple, but as my father noted, very satisfactory to watch. Della was so evidently bursting with pride at what she had done, and utterly amazed that she had managed to do it. Nothing could alter the fact that her eyes were crossed, that she was growing plump if not fat, that she was definitely not a pretty woman, that she was not young, that she was not graceful. She knew all this, but pride and a sense of fulfilment of her destiny made her shine and smile.

The discussions about her that my mother had with Overbury before the happy engagement day were delightful. Overbury, like a good diplomat, approached his plan of marriage to Della obliquely, and with due consideration for my mother's convenience. He called on her one morning, like any young suitor on a parent, in his best tail-coat and wearing a black polka-dotted bow-tie. My mother was writing letters in the drawing-room. It was summer, and I was in the sunny room beside her, reading my holiday task before going out to sail my model yacht in the park.

"Madam," Overbury said, "might I ask for a few minutes alone with you? Pardon me, please, Master Jack. You know I've no secrets from you, but there are things older people like to talk about alone. I'm sure you'll understand."

I got up and left the room at once, boy-like, smiling, shy, and obedient, without a word.

"Madam," continued Overbury when I had gone—my mother described the scene afterwards with wit and charity—"do you think Della Carter would like to get married?"

"Why, yes, Overbury; I think any woman would. But to whom?" said my mother, knowing already.

Overbury pushed his chin into his chest and looked deprecatingly at the floor, but admitted nothing.

"She could scarcely expect a youngish party, I think, madam," he next ventured. "In fact an oldish party would be more suitable."

He paused, watching her, rocking for a moment on his heels, according to his habit.

"But do you suppose she would like marriage, apart from liking to be married?" he continued presently. "That was what I was wondering, madam."

My mother looked at him, affectionately. "Why, Overbury," she said, "I think liking to be married would certainly come first. Marriages are funny things after a time anyway. You are, of course, the oldish party, Overbury?"

Overbury nodded, beaming with pleasure that she had taken the initiative. It was what he had intended.

"Yes, madam, that was admittedly the idea. In fact, I came to ask your permission and the master's, and to talk it over with you. I've no family living you see, and Della came from the orphanage as you know. I thought it'd be good for Della to have someone really her own, though you take the place of her family, to a great extent, you and the master. As a matter of fact, for me, it'll be almost like marrying into your family, if you don't mind my saying so, madam."

My mother stood up. "That's rather how I feel too, Overbury," she said. "But Della, what does she say about it? After all, she's cast as the principal girl."

"I haven't asked her, madam," said Overbury. "I wanted to talk to you and the master first. If you agree and he agrees and she agrees, with your permission, we would stay here as man and wife."

My mother put out her hand. "My congratulations, Overbury," she said. "It'll be wonderful for Della to have someone like you, really her own, as you put it."

" You don't think she'll refuse, do you, madam? " Overbury asked.

" She'd better not! " exclaimed my mother.

Nor did she. After consulting my mother and father in her turn, enchanted with the prospect of marriage, but resisting its " suddenness " with true penny-novelette reserve, she first became engaged, then in the autumn, six weeks after Overbury's first approach to my mother, they were married.

They insisted on no white dress for the bride, but accepted the reception at home, the Bishop of Hawley to marry them at the parish church, and a honeymoon in Torquay.

Della made few comments about marriage, but it evidently suited her. She became even more tranquil as the remembrance of the orphanage receded and receded, and there was a shine on her skin and a good sharp glint in her eye. Her only major pronouncement to my mother about marriage and life with Overbury was pleasant and calmly earthy.

" It's nice to be with Mr. Overbury, particularly in the cold weather," she said. " And he looks very pretty when he's asleep; you wouldn't believe it, madam. And if you'd told me about marriage before, madam—all about it, you know—I just wouldn't have believed it. I wouldn't really."

This was evidently praise, for she never said anything more to us about the subject. She did, however, tell her favourites among our guests what a good husband Mr. Overbury was, and how pretty he looked when he was asleep. Prettiness was an attribute which nobody, I think, had ever connected with Overbury before. It was in the grey crossed eyes of the beholder, precious to her, and delightful for friends to hear about through her lips.

Overbury and Della served us together for another ten years after their marriage, then lived out four happy years of Overbury's retirement, during which he read and studied ceaselessly. It was through Della that the last and perhaps the most original fact about him came to light. He died of pneumonia one Boxing Day morning at a cottage on my father's estate in Herefordshire, and she came to us about his books. A number of them were from the library in Hereford. Together, she and I piled them into my car to take them back. They were a curious collection, on all kinds of subjects. The common factor about them I did not notice until it was pointed out to us by the librarian.

" Ah, poor Mr. Overbury's books," he said as he received them. " A wonderful man, if I may say so, but a queer reader. He read everything, no matter what it was about, but in alphabetical order. He told me he'd get through the whole of our library if he was given time." He sighed, then continued.

"But he didn't do too badly, you know. He'd got to the letter L before he died."

Then I noticed. Every author's name in the small collection we were returning began with the letter L and was marked off on Overbury's own alphabetical list, from the library.

Della, too, knew all about it, but did not think it strange. "Oh yes, Mr. Overbury read everything just as it came," she said. "When he finished a book, he crossed it off in his catalogue. He reckoned he'd be done with Hereford when he was 82, and then go on to Ross."

He missed going on to Ross by just six years.

Della returned to our service after his death, and still lives, herself now in retirement, with the memories of her dear Mr. Overbury which she retains, fresh as life, like my own.

★ ★ ★

TRAINING FOR MARRIAGE

It was most difficult to find in Moscow a place for hugging and kissing.

Robert was renting a room in one part of Moscow for a fabulous sum, but under a condition that he never bring a wife or somebody to live with him and, of course, I had no room of my own, and it was not permitted to go like to the Cherokee Park for loving, and we had no car for parking.

Then I got a wonderful idea. We would go to the big station where trains come in every few minutes, and whenever a train came in we would rush into each other's arms and kiss and kiss, and then wait for the next train.

But one day the militia man came up to us and say, "You have met enough trains now. Go home!"

WILLIE SNOW ETHRIDGE, *Nila*

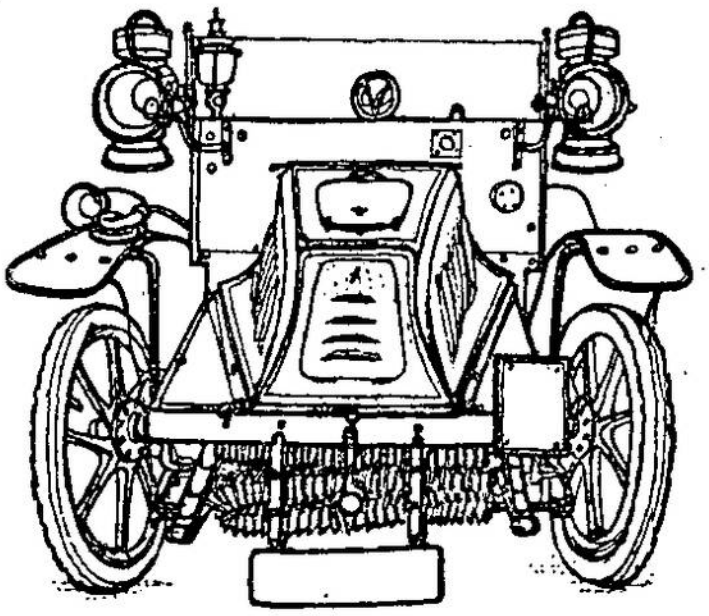
CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION

I was travelling in a train. The carriage was full, save for one seat opposite me. I was smoking a cigar, and had my feet on the opposite seat. Much to my annoyance a little clerk hopped in at a station and sat down in the one vacant seat, and pulling out his last cigarette, lighted it.

I said: "Are you aware that this is not a smoking carriage?" On which he threw his cigarette out of the window. Looking up, he saw me smoking my cigar. "But you are smoking, sir," he said.

"Yes," I replied, "but I thought you might have conscientious scruples."

HESKETH PEARSON, *Beerbohm Tree*



off the ration

When that I had and a little tinny car—
With a heigh-ho, the wind and the screen—
Empty the radiator !

RUDYARD KIPLING

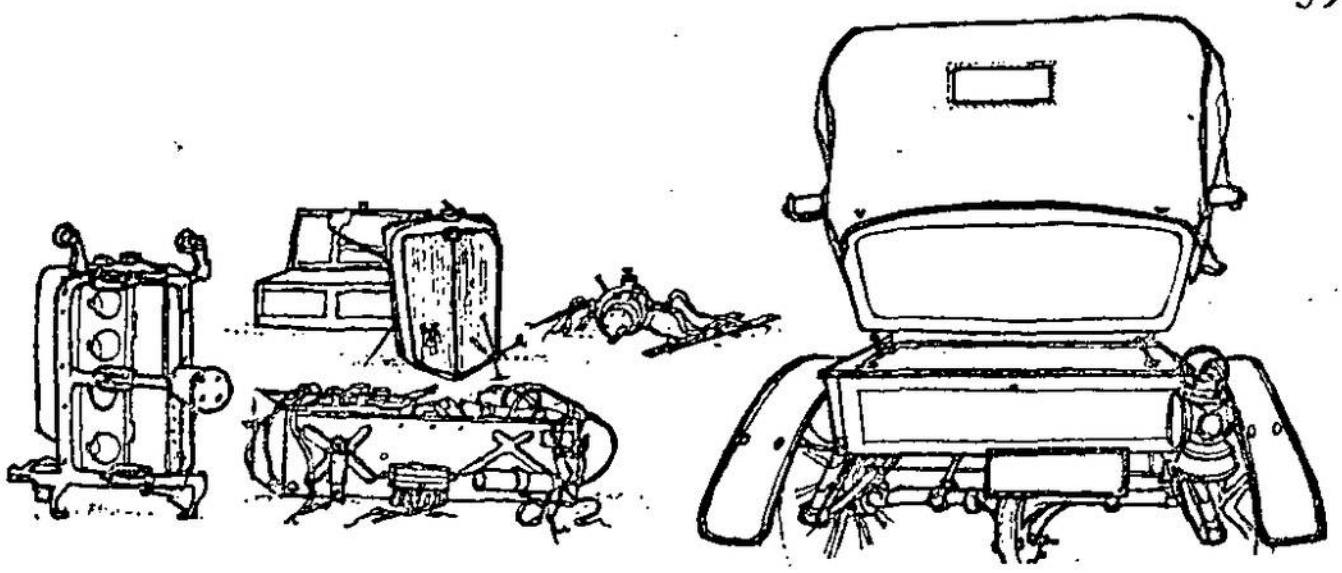
Apollo through the heavens rode
In glinting gold attire;
His car was bright with chrysolite,
His horses snorted fire.
He held them to their frantic course
Across the blazing sky.
His darling son was Phaëthon,
Who begged to have a try . . .

Out of the purple doors of dawn
Phaëthon drove the horses;
They felt his hand could not command,
They left their wonted courses.
And from the chariot Phaëthon
Plunged like a falling star—
And so, my boy, no, no, my boy,
You cannot take the car.

MORRIS BISHOP, *Phaëthon*

On Springs of Song

We began to sing "Onward Christian Soldiers." All the Wiggins sang it at the top of their voices, strong and clear, and Uncle Tom and Aunt Fanny sang low and sweet, and the wind sang, and the car went singing along, rising and falling on its soft springs like a ship. Past the Roman Catholic convent with the black mark on the wall shaped like a woman who was murdered there when it was a coaching inn and which showed through every



coat of cement we went singing and sailing, averting our eyes, and down the hill, singing and rising and falling like a ship, past the fine big houses of the eternally respectable and rich . . .

" That's the first ten miles, then, Tom," our dad shouted triumphantly above the wind and the singing and the sighing of the car. Uncle Tom eased me away and pulled his watch out of his waistcoat pocket. " Barely three parts of an hour, Sam," he said, and our dad nodded in a satisfied way and answered, " It makes you wonder what they'll think of next." " Yes," said Uncle Tom, shaking his head, " It's wonderful."

MAURICE WIGGIN, *In Spite of the Price of Hay*

Late Lamented

Cold is the night and chill the grate.
My Loved One fareth far and late.
My Loved One tarrieth late afar—
He hath a heater in the car.

JUSTIN RICHARDSON, *Silver Lining*

All's Wells That Ends Well

H.G.'s departure was typical of his ebullience. A new car was brought to the house. " I have never driven a car before," said H. G. [Wells], " but I have read a book about it so I shall now drive myself to Southampton." Father was horrified that genius should expose itself to such peril, but H.G. refused even to practise on the drive before setting forth alone on his journey. The only assistance he permitted was for Mother to tie a red bunch of wool on the accelerator pedal and a green one on the brake to remind him which was which. Father paced the study in acute anxiety until H.G. rang up to announce gleefully that he had not only reached his destination intact but had averaged 28.4 m.p.h. " But I shall go much faster tomorrow," he chirped.

JOAN GRANT, *Time Out of Mind*

Two-Stroke

And now I have a motor-bike
And up and down the road I hike
Seeing the pretty birds and flowers,
And windmills with their sails and towers . . .
And hear the mowers mowing hay,
And smell the great sea far away!
And always keeping—cars be blowed!—
Well on the wrong side of the road,
And never heeding hoots nor warners,
Especially around the corners,
For even down the steepest hill
Redemption saves me from a spill.
I have a flapper on the carrier
And some day I am going to marry her.

E. V. KNOX, *The Everlasting Percy*

Twinkling Symbol

Dr. Bisch . . . examines the case of three hypothetical men who start across a street on a red light and get in the way of an oncoming automobile. A dodges successfully; B stands still, "accepting the situation with calm and resignation," thus becoming one of my favourite heroes in modern belles-lettres; and C hesitates, wavers, jumps backward and forward, and finally runs head on into the car . . . Let us single out what Dr. Bisch thinks the Freudians would say about poor Mr. C who ran right into the car. He writes, "'Sex hunger,' the Freudians would declare." Dr. Bisch himself leans toward the Freudian analysis of Mr. C, for he says in this same chapter, "An automobile bearing down upon you may be a sex symbol at that, you know, especially if you dream it."

It is my contention, of course, that even if you dream it, it is probably not a sex symbol, but merely an automobile bearing down upon you. And if it bears down upon you in real life, I am sure it is an automobile. I have seen the same behaviour that characterized Mr. C displayed by a squirrel (Mr. S) that lives in the grounds of my house in the country. He is a fairly tame squirrel, happily mated and not sex-hungry, if I am any judge, but nevertheless he frequently runs out toward my automobile when I start down the driveway, and then hesitates, wavers, jumps forward and backward, and occasionally would run right into the car except that he is awfully fast on his feet and that I always hurriedly put on the brakes of the 1935 V-8 Sex Symbol that I drive.

JAMES THURBER, *Sex Ex Machina*

A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

BREACH OF THE PEACE

" It's that woman," said the Sergeant
Petrella didn't need to ask who he meant

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

" READING aloud," said Sergeant Gwilliam, " writing, including handwriting, spelling, and punctuation, and the first four rules in arithmetic, including Imperial weights and measures and simple fractions."

" Simple fractions."

" Right. Vulgar fractions are for Inspectors. Also decimals." The Sergeant contemplated the tattered copy of Police Regulations sourly. " You may have wondered why I'm still a Sergeant—"

" As a matter of fact," said Petrella, " I had."

" Vulgar fractions," said Gwilliam. " Next comes geography. Especially the geography of the British Isles. Most important that. Suppose you're sent off to arrest someone in Musselburgh. No good saying, ' Where the hell's that? ' Is it? ". The vexed subject of promotion was once again under discussion.

Normally, as the Police Regulations point out, a constable must have completed five years' service—*the last two being free from punishment other than reprimand or caution*—before he can be considered for the lofty rank of Sergeant; and four years before he can even take the exam. But there is a wise proviso to all this. If he manages to " satisfy the Chief Officer of Police " that he is a special case, he may be allowed to jump the queue. And in the six months Petrella had spent at Scotland Yard and the two years

he had been at Highside, quite a few Special Reports had found their way onto his superior's desk.

Superintendent Haxtell had even gone so far as to suggest that he might be able to skip the exam.

"You're educated," he said. "Got School Certificate, or whatever they call it nowadays, I expect."

But Petrella was doubtful. He had been comprehensively educated, but on somewhat unorthodox lines. "I've got a Spanish Certificate of Instruction," he said, "and a pass degree from an Egyptian University. Also a Certificate of the Elementary degree of Competence in Viniculture—"

"I think you'd better take the exam," said Haxtell.

So Petrella borrowed the necessary textbooks and renewed his acquaintance with Imperial weights and measures and the geography of the British Isles. He was memorizing the rivers of the East Coast, when the riot call came through.

"Church Hall," said the telephone. "And make it snappy."

Petrella grabbed his hat, and was out of Mrs. Catt's lodging-house and running down the street. He considered fetching his bicycle, but abandoned the idea. He would be quicker on his feet. A police tender overtook him, and he jumped onto the running-board. "What's up?" he asked.

Sergeant Gwilliam, who was sitting beside the driver, said, "A lot of little bastards started roughing up the Church Hall, but they got a bit more'n they bargained for." Then to the driver, "Stop at the top of the street. We'll form up and go in together. Use your weight."

There were five of them including Petrella. Five men who keep together and know how to behave are a formidable force.

At one moment Petrella saw a milling crowd of youths, flailing arms and dark bodies. The next, they had broken through, and were on the steps of the Church Hall. There had been no need to do anything. The sight of police reinforcements had had its usual effect and the crowd was shredding away.

The Reverend Philip Freebone, a stalwart young man, had been holding the doorway with a hockey stick. He had the beginnings of a black eye, his hair was on end, and there was a purely secular light in his eye.

"Glad you got here," he panted.

"Who started it?" said Gwilliam.

"Young Corky—he and his friends."

Gwilliam said to Petrella, "Grab Corky."

Petrella knew Corky Williams of old. He looked for a light mop of blond, almost white hair; and saw it, in the dusk, under a lamp post.

Petrella ran. The remains of the crowd was melting fast, but he had to jump one prostrate body and push past two boys who were still quietly finishing off a private argument. For a moment he lost sight of Corky. Then he saw him, and put on speed. Corky ran. Petrella ran. The chase lasted the length of two streets, and then Corky, seeing he was going to lose the race, slowed down, and Petrella grabbed his arm.

" Come back and do some explaining."

" Sure, I'll come with you, Mr. Petrella," said Corky. He had the appearance of a lost waif and a voice that had melted harder hearts than Petrella's. " What do you want me for? It's nothing to do with me. I was just passing."

" Save it," said Petrella. " We'll hear what the parson has to say."

" You needn't hold my arm," said Corky. " I won't run away."

" I'm glad to hear it," said Petrella, and held him twice as tight.

Back at the Church Hall, volunteers were clearing up the mess. Four boys were being guarded by a policeman in the changing-room, and Sergeant Gwilliam was being talked to by the Reverend Freebone.

" What that Corky wants," he said, " is the repeated application of a hard-heeled shoe to his bottom. He looks like a cherub, his mother spoils him, and if someone doesn't do something drastic, he's going to grow up into a gangster."

" I know his mother," said Sergeant Gwilliam shortly. " What happened tonight? "

" A week ago I threw young Corky out of the Club. For what seemed to me good reasons. I found he'd been using the recreation circle as cover for a pontoon school. And not even—" the reverend gentleman choked slightly—" an honest pontoon school. The cards were marked. And if a boy complained about his losses, he was intimidated by some of the older boys—you've got three or four of the worst of them in there. But they weren't the organizers. They did what they were told—by Corky."

" I see," said Gwilliam, " and tonight? "

" Tonight he turned up, with his supporters, and started shouting at the boys who were coming in to Club night. They didn't like it—but it wasn't until they threw a stone through the window that the trouble really started—"

" I can take it from there," said Gwilliam. " Who threw the stone? Was that Corky? "

" I don't think so. He kept very much in the background. But he was there all right. That head of hair's unmistakable."

" I'd better have a word with him," said Gwilliam.

A quarter of an hour later, he returned. He looked frustrated.

" Either he's the most accomplished liar I've ever listened to —or we're all dreaming," he said. " You're sure he was here, when the trouble started, I mean? "

" Absolutely sure. Does he deny it? "

" He says that his mother sent him out on an errand—he's got all the times and details pat—that he came past the end of the road, heard a lot of noise and shouting, and stopped to see what it was all about."

" Let's see the other boys," suggested Petrella.

The four youths in the changing-room all said the same thing in suspicious unison. They'd been walking past the end of the road. (They hadn't taken the same trouble as Corky to construct an elaborate alibi, Petrella noticed.) They had heard a row. They had stopped to watch. It was nothing to do with them.

" Someone must have started it," suggested Gwilliam. " Did you happen to see anyone—throwing a stone, for instance? "

They had seen no one.

" You didn't happen to notice young Williams? "

They had none of them noticed Corky.

The police retired, baffled.

" Ask Corky," said Petrella, " why he ran away from me."

Corky was brought in. His blue eyes grew large as he understood the purport of the question. " *Me* run away? " he said. " Why, it just isn't true. I was walking away—I didn't want any part in it. I was two streets away when this other man came running after me. And grabbed me by the arm. He grabbed so hard it hurt."

Petrella could almost see the blue eyes filling with tears. He looked at Sergeant Gwilliam, and shook his head.

The Sergeant drew a visible breath. " I'm charging you all," he said. " Breach of the Peace."

Petrella had early discovered that it was useless trying to set aside periods for study in his spare time. He had no spare time. Three times in his nominal rest hours he had retired to his lodgings with his textbooks and three times he had been snatched from them by the calls of duty. Now he kept the books in the C.I.D. room—a small room, up a flight of stairs at the back of Highside Police Station, which he shared with Sergeant Gwilliam —and studied when he could.

He was committing to memory that difficult table which starts: " Twenty-four grains one pennyweight, twenty pennyweight one ounce," when Haxtell looked in.

" This Williams case," he said. " It looks as if it's blowing up into something. They've asked for a remand so that they can

brief Counsel. And the high-ups are getting worried and talking about bringing in a big gun themselves."

"It's that woman," said Gwilliam. There was no need to ask. They both knew who he meant.

"They're building up a lovely case of persecution," said Haxtell. "Here's how it goes. Six months ago we charged Mrs. Williams with receiving property—one portable wireless set—knowing the same to have been stolen. So did she, and so it had been. Only we weren't able to prove it. We knew it had been looted from the Sonning Town Goods Depot. Knowing isn't proving. She produced a receipt, from a wireless shop, now defunct. And a neighbour, who swore blind she'd had that set for two years. And the Court gave her the benefit of the doubt."

"I see now, sir," said Petrella, "where Corky gets his eye for detail."

"They're both very high-class liars. Now, the story goes on, having failed to convict Mrs. Williams, we try and get at her by trumping up a story about her son. Sounds quite convincing, too. I'd believe it myself if I didn't know it was all lies."

It was in the lunch hour, on the following day, that Mrs. Williams called to see Petrella. There was, in theory, nothing to prevent people visiting the C.I.D. room, but in fact, this was the first occasion he could remember of an outsider penetrating to it. An apologetic constable put his head round the door, and said, "She had something very important to say—I thought I'd better bring her up."

"That's all right," said Petrella, pushing a work on Elementary Punctuation back into the drawer. "Show her in."

A sight of Mrs. Williams at close quarters showed where Corky had got his good looks from, too. She must have been nearer forty than thirty, but she possessed those firm, regular, very slightly exaggerated lines of beauty which are so popular in saloon bars and on the music-hall stage. The strong suggestion of a flower garden in the month of August advanced with her into the room.

As Petrella studied her, she repaid him the compliment. She seemed surprised that he was so young.

"Please sit down," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Her surprise seemed to increase when he spoke. "You're educated, aren't you?" she said. "What are you doing in this crowd?"

"Earning my living."

"Must be better ways than this." Her glance comprehended the bare and dusty room, the worn linoleum, the shiny patches on Petrella's hard-worked elbows.

" I'm endeavouring to better myself," said Petrella seriously.

" So I heard. You're going for Sergeant, aren't you? " If Petrella was surprised he managed to conceal it. " That's one of the reasons I came to see you. You heard of Micky Malone? "

Petrella said nothing. Everyone had heard of Micky Malone, housebreaker extraordinary. And every policeman in North London would have given his belt and buttons for the chance of presenting a real, watertight, lawyerproof case against him.

" If you pulled him in—with the stuff on him—that'd do you some good, wouldn't it? "

Petrella sat very still. He had been a policeman long enough to realize that just so had all great criminals been caught. By some woman, like Mrs. Williams, coming quietly to a C.I.D. room and speaking a few simple words. What sordid story of intrigue and violence, of passion and treachery, lay behind those words was often not known.

" If you've any information about Malone," he said, " I'd be glad to hear it."

" So you shall," said Mrs. Williams, crossing one shapely leg over the other. " When the charge against my son is dismissed."

" I'm not the magistrate," said Petrella.

" Now don't you come that sort of stuff with me. I've talked to the boy, and I know just where he stands. There's only one thing against him. That he ran away when he saw you coming. All you've got to do is take it back. Say you made a mistake. It was some other boy. He was walking away quietly, like he said."

" How can I say it when it isn't true? "

" That's up to you," said Mrs. Williams. " It won't be the first lie the police have told. What about it? Do we deal? "

If Petrella hesitated, it was nothing to do with his decision. He had come to that minutes earlier. It was just that there were certain angles which still puzzled him. At last he said, almost absent-mindedly, " No, of course I can't make any bargain with you. Now if that's all—"

Mrs. Williams was on her feet and she suddenly looked ten years older and a great deal uglier. " I'm warning you," she said. " You're young. You don't understand how things go. I've got friends."

" Mind the step," said Petrella.

" Certainly she's got friends," said Gwilliam, when Petrella told him about it. " And that perishing little jack-in-office, Councillor Hayes, is one of them. He's had it in for the police ever since we didn't find out who did *his* house nine months ago.

I wouldn't be surprised if he had pulled the job himself for the insurance money."

"I don't think Hayes is a crook," said Petrella. "Just a busybody. He's certainly got a bee in his bonnet about the police."

"As long as he keeps it in his bonnet, and doesn't let it get out and sting us."

"I've just been reading a book on civics," said Petrella. "It points out that while, outside London, the Police Forces are under the control of the Borough Council or the County Council as the case may be, in London they are answerable only to the Home Secretary."

"And who's *he* answerable to?" said Gwilliam. "Parliament. And who are they answerable to? I'll tell you. Any nosey little busybody who chooses to make a fuss and get the Press moving."

Superintendent Barstow at Division was saying the same thing, but in different words, to Haxtell.

"This is one case we want to win," he said. "I hear the defence have got Marsham-Tallboys—you remember him? He's the man who gave the Chief Superintendent hell in the Warehouse case. We've briefed Tomlins in self-defence."

"What's all the fuss about?" said Haxtell uneasily.

"It's just one of those things," said Barstow. "If the boy gets off, people will believe we have been persecuting the Williams family. Councillor Hayes is bound to raise it for them. He's not a crook, but he's a susceptible old fool. And Mrs. Williams has got him round her little finger. The Press have been a bit restive lately, and this'll be a Roman holiday for them."

Haxtell didn't inquire who would play the role of early Christian martyr. He knew.

"There's more to it than that," said Barstow. "I'm told there's a sort of pressure group gunning for the Home Secretary. And criticism of the Police is the best ammunition they can have."

"Do you think we ought to drop the case, sir?"

Superintendent Barstow slowly turned a dusky red. "Certainly I don't!" he said. "What you've got to do is win it."

Unconscious of the clouds of almost political magnitude which were banking in the west, Petrella made his way quietly home that evening to his lodgings. His path took him through Barnaby Passage, and in the darkest part of the passage two figures came out to meet him. His heart gave a jump, then steadied again. They were only boys; as he now saw, two of the Harrington children, Ron, the ten-year-old, and a smaller one whose name he had forgotten. Ron seemed to have something he wanted to say, but as he spoke in a disjointed and breathless whisper, it took quite a long time for him to get it across.

When at last he had made his meaning clear, Petrella was filled with a deep and unholy joy. " Are you absolutely sure? " he said.

" Course I'm sure," said Ron. " Hazel's got a friend whose sister chars for Missus Williams. She saw it. She didn't like to say nothing, see. But it's there all right. On a little plate, inside the back of the clock. That's why Ma Williams never seen it."

" Ron," said Petrella, " next time I'm by here I'm going to bring you the biggest and most unsuitable box of sweets that money can buy."

" 'S all right," said Ron. " Corky, he won my money, by cheating, see. That's why we thought we'd tell you. We didn't want any sweets."

" You shall have 'em all the same," said Petrella.

The case of the Police against Williams (and others) was one of the most remarkable ever heard in Helenwood Magistrates' Court. And its crises were none the less real for not all being apparent on the surface.

The presiding Magistrate, Mr. Benkall, was not what is popularly called a " policeman's magistrate." He decided cases on the evidence produced and in the light of his own rugged common sense. But even he could not be unaware of the implications of the case he was hearing; of the crowds round the door, of the packed public benches, of eminent Counsel in their places, and of a press box, usually occupied by one elderly reporter from the *Highside Mercury*, that was now bulging with representatives of the National Press.

It took an hour to clear the routine matters and the case was called just before midday.

By four o'clock in the afternoon it was apparent that the police were winning. The insidious Mr. Marsham-Tallboys had done his best with Mrs. Williams and his worst with the police, but on the whole it seemed probable that the evidence of one clergyman, six boys, one detective sergeant, and one detective constable was going to be preferred to that of a mother, however sympathetically represented.

It was time for the defence to call up its reserves. At four o'clock, Mr. Councillor Hayes entered the box. He appeared as a witness to character and told the magistrate that he had always found Williams a cheerful, honest, and truthful boy, of very good family. He knew his mother well. A widow and a very worthy citizen. The family was a credit to Highside. He could not for a moment believe that a boy from such an excellent family would do the things imputed to him.

When Mr. Tomlins rose to cross-examine, he seemed, for a

moment, to have forgotten what he wanted to ask. He was an amiable teddy bear of a man, with the untidiest wig at the Old Bailey, and his kindliness and apparent vagueness had been deceiving criminals, to their undoing, for the past twenty-five years. He said at last, apologetically, " I'm afraid I missed your names—Mr. Hayes. Your Christian names, I mean. Could you repeat them? "

Mr. Hayes, surprised, said, " Roderick Winstanley," in the strangled tones of a man unexpectedly asked to repeat his Christian names in public.

Mr. Tomlins repeated, " Roderick Winstanley Hayes," in a dreamy voice and made a careful note on the margin of his brief. " You have, I believe, always been interested in local government topics? "

" That is so."

" Am I right in saying that you gave a series of lectures on them, some years ago, to the London Institute of Civic Studies? "

" That is correct."

" In fact, I believe, so appreciative were your students that they presented you, at the end of the course, with a handsome walnut clock, with a small plate inside the back, as a token of their appreciation? "

" I—yes, that is so."

" And this was one of the articles stolen from your house, some nine months ago, and never recovered? "

" The police," said Mr. Hayes with heavy sarcasm, and a glance at the Press, " have not succeeded in restoring it to me—yet."

" Really, Mr. Tomlins," said the Magistrate. " Wide though the latitude is that is permitted to Counsel in this Court, I fail to see—"

He was interrupted. Mrs. Williams was observed to be on her feet and fighting her way through the crowd, towards the exit. The face that she turned over her shoulder as she reached the door was as white as paper.

" I was only going to ask the witness," said Mr. Tomlins gently, " whether he was aware that the clock is at this very moment to be found on Mrs. Williams's drawing-room mantelpiece."

" How *very* satisfactory," said Superintendent Barstow. " How really very satisfactory." He ticked the points of satisfaction off on his fingers. " First, of course, that we won the case. I notice that has killed the news story dead. Secondly, that old Hayes should have made a perfect fool of himself in public—giving evidence about that woman's respectability when all the time she'd

got a clock *stolen from him* on her drawing-room mantelpiece. Thirdly, that clock's going to be a very useful bit of evidence when we go against Mrs. Williams for receiving. Stolen within the last twelve months, section 43 of the Larceny Act—I needn't tell you—and if she doesn't go down this time, what with all the rest of the stuff we found in her cellar, I'm a Dutchman. And fourthly . . . "

His finger waggled. There was, he knew, a fourth cause for satisfaction. " Oh yes. Petrella's promotion has come through. He's a Sergeant now. Probationary, of course."

" The entire contents of my house to . . ."

ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT

Everyone's a stranger in the dark

BY RHYS DAVIES

ON this particular icy Wednesday in late January, Mrs. Bessie Evans's routine followed its normal course for a drinking evening. Rhiannon, the afternoon help from the village, safely gone, the sitting-room fire compactly built up, curtains closed against the bluely frozen night—all was set for three hours of slow pleasure. The isolation of the cottage among the cold-stiffened pines, even the ordinary fact that it was situated in a secret fold among the interior hills of Wales, seemed to give an additional relish to the coming session.

Bessie liked a hard winter: no vulgarly beaming sun nagging at one to go out and get healthy; no reproachful flowers to water in the damned garden; no malign wasps or mosquitoes; no birds yelling their little heads off at the crack of dawn. Also, a bitter frost, such as bruised the air this evening, raised, she was sure of it, a more fiery tang in her favourite beverage. She had arrived at the connoisseur's stage in such matters.

At seven o'clock, dressed in black satin, she ate boiled silverside beef with appreciation, neglecting none of the subsidiary dishes Rhiannon—an excellent cook, ignorant village woman though she was—had prepared. There were preserved pears, a fat junket, local farm cheese and butter, home-baked bread and, finally, a slice of chocolate cake. She ate not so much from greed as out of a realization, based on experience, that a solid foundation of food helped to generate from whisky the particular rich luxuriant glow she desired. She would go up to bed feeling a wonderful lack of contumaciousness towards the world.

At half past seven, bosom preceding her in royal solidity, she moved from the kitchen to the sitting-room, unlocked the old press of carved black oak, and drew out a glass and two bottles. One of the bottles was a third full, the other unopened. Her chest, which was that of a handsomely endowed woman of forty, gave its usual preparatory heave; it suggested both a greeting and an admonishment.

Invariably she subjected herself to a strict observance of drinking exactly two-thirds of a bottle on alternate evenings of the week only, retiring to bed immediately after the sitting-room clock struck ten. It was a discipline from which she drew self-esteem and a deduction that she was not really going bad. On the rare occasions when she yielded to temptation and stayed up until eleven finishing a whole bottle, drastic scolding and punishment—such as doing without a meal or furiously working on the neglected garden—were administered the next day.

As for the whiskyless evenings, these, of course, were hard to endure, and when, still more rarely, she broke her rule completely and enjoyed two consecutive sessions of intoxication, the lapse acquired a wicked splendour that almost made her topple over into the decision to give up her tenancy of Old Well Cottage and return, contrition bearing her up, to the place she had come from.

The fire burnt with purplish energy. An oil lamp cast a clear glow from its pretty shade; under it, a deeply upholstered chair took Bessie's body with a companionable sigh from its springs.

A lady of leisure, secure in her domain, she had no difficulty —at least, on such nights as this—in enjoying vicarious ownership of the charming old cottage and its kindred furnishings. She had rented it, two years ago, from a man known locally as Shadrach the Gas—he managed the gasworks in the market-town—and, because of its isolation and the lack of electricity and other main services, the rent was most reasonable.

After a few preliminary sips—the whisky was never tainted with other liquids—she turned on the battery wireless. There was a programme of rollicking variety turns. She enjoyed a good dirty laugh, liked boisterous comedians with red-nosed anecdotes of undignified disasters. What she *couldn't* stand was those women who heaved their guts up in some god-awful wail about love gone wrong.

One of these upset the programme tonight, and Bessie, pouring her fourth large measure by then, shouted at the wireless cabinet, "You silly cabbage, serve you right if he let you down. We got to *fight* the devils, my gal!"

At nine-fifteen she jeered good-humouredly at a lecturer who followed the variety turns. "Ancient Egyptians, they were all like us, you fathead; you can't change human nature." She shut him off, lit the single cigarette she allowed herself on whisky nights, and, as usual, sat back pondering on plans.

Always, after about half a bottle had been consumed, problems acquired a roseate condition. They would be solved with delicious ease. There was always Susan in Australia; Susan and her husband's expanding drapery business in Sydney; Susan

wanted an experienced colleague from the home country to help; Susan, though she could be mean as cat's meat, valued her; Susan . . . Her drooping eyelids suddenly opened; she sat bolt upright, her eyes sidling round the room.

Had a piece of coal exploded in the grate? Yes. She bent to the low table and poured the last measured allowance from the second bottle. It was a quarter to ten.

She began to giggle. At tea-time, Rhiannon had told her more about Elfed, the widowed farmer who had been asking questions in the village about the tenant of Old Well Cottage. Why didn't she come down to the chapel on Sundays? He had seen her many times in the returning market bus, heavily laden basket on her knees, and her face—Rhiannon herself enjoyed the inquisitive farmer's compliment—" bright as a bunch of snapdragons."

Rhiannon thought he would soon be offering to carry that heavy basket the quarter mile from the village bus stop up to the cottage above the slope of pines.

Bessie, sipping her drink and purring beautifully inside now, let out a guffaw. Those bottles in the basket! After her two years of residence the villagers, even Rhiannon, had never found out about the whisky in the capacious wicker basket which sat, displaying a crust of groceries and fruit, on her lap in the bus after the twice-weekly visit to the market-town six miles away.

But Rhiannon, her only link with the village, often hinted to her that the lone Mrs. Evans, although thought of respectfully as a dignified woman of means, still roused speculation. Why had she chosen to live among strangers in such a quiet district?

" Tell the ladies and gentlemen of Sychan," the recluse had said, " that I've had my day with the best man that ever lived, and I've come here to remember it undisturbed by other things."

When she had arrived, she told Shadrach the Gas that her late husband, a war casualty, used to motor her at weekends through this wonderful countryside and they had decided to retire hereabouts in due course.

Still dressed in black, even after all that time of widowhood, she had given out the flavour of a woman who would mourn her loss for ever. Yet acceptance of her became solidified when the villagers began to refer to her as " Mrs. Evans Old Well," and now she could enter the bus without the babble of voices dropping.

A very deep seventeenth-century well, still functioning, was sunk before the cottage porch. There was a legend of a sinful wife, in far-off stricter days, being dropped down it and her ghost was said still to haunt the garden. Shadrach the Gas pooh-poohed all that, yet after buying and furnishing the cottage he did not live long there himself.

At five minutes to ten, still giggling, she exclaimed, " Elfed wants to carry my basket, does he! Well, his chance *might* come —if his oats show a good profit some year! " The giggling came to an abrupt stop. Her glass was empty. She frowned.

The price of Scotch! Thirty-six shillings the bottle! Occasionally a sort of paralysis gripped her in the region of the solar plexus when she approached her bank in the market town. Otherwise, she treated her legacy of three thousand pounds—it had arrived, indeed, with a fairy-wand unexpectedness from a bachelor uncle struck down untimely and intestate—as subject to equally magic removal in the granite building where it lay in a deposit account yielding two and a half per cent interest. Although only a glance was required, she found it increasingly difficult to examine the state of her finances.

Anyhow, she could always go back to the drapery. Or disappear—assuming she still had the fare—to Australia. Beautiful, beautiful Australia.

When the mantelpiece clock began striking its ten crisp *pings* she sat up rigid again and, arms folded across her chest, stared thunderously at the newly opened bottle.

" No, Bessie! " she cried out. " *No!* You can't afford it. You've got to go to Australia . . . Lolling around here, you big good-for-nothing! " She thrust the cork in the bottle, gave it a bang with her fist, and heaved herself up.

Then came the satisfaction of locking the bottles and glass in the press. Tomorrow morning the empty bottle would be dropped down the well. This method of disposal amused her; she liked to hear the far-away splash. Perhaps, when she was safe in Australia, Shadrach the Gas or another tenant might discover a deposit of four or five hundred bottles in that choked-up old well which was supposed to be the residence of a ghost!

The press key safely hidden from Rhiannon's prying, the usual buoyant feeling of achievement, propriety observed, and self-admiration rewarded her. She began to sing. Bed now! Sleep would come easily, deep warm sleep in that lovely bed of good linen, fleecy blankets, and red eiderdown, the world obliterated. What more could a woman want?

She bolted the front and back doors, still singing *Ar Hyd y Nos*. Every downstairs window was already fastened. Not that she was a nervous woman. Besides, burglars never functioned in these tranquilly unimportant parts; neither were tramps ever seen. She took the small lamp standing on a table in the hall, which was so cold that, despite the interior whisky-warmth, she shivered.

As, vaguely unsteady, she mounted the crooked staircase of

black oak, she was unaware that the lamp's flame danced within the glass funnel under the cretonne shade. On the bulgy, fortress-thick walls shadows danced clownishly. Sleepy though she was, she still hummed the popular dirge-like old melody.

When she opened the door of the front bedroom, her attention was caught at once by the shape in the bed. Yet she did not cry out, and the lamp did not drop from her hand. She only stared at the shape with the same thunderous intensity as that with which she had looked at the bottle downstairs when the hour struck.

The shape—clearly it was that of a man, with the head visible on the farther of the two pillows—had its back to her. The old-fashioned double bed stood against the wall and its occupant had taken the inner position. No sound of breathing came. Bessie's eyes roved, with an effort, to garments dropped on a chair. A pair of shoes stood neatly together on a rug. Most conspicuous of all, a soft felt hat hung, rakish-looking, on the knob of one of the ebony bedposts.

These evidences of outrageous intrusion did not exert on her, a married woman, the effect they might have achieved with a spinster. Nevertheless, in the long moments of silence, her face became drained of its opulent colour. A dim memory came to her of an old, now-abandoned country custom: *Caru yn y gweli*, it was called. A suitor climbed through a bedroom window—a ladder was usually left conveniently handy—and, if acceptable, he was allowed to stay an hour or two, with marriage in view. It was just possible that in remote and unspoilt villages such as Sychan the custom was still followed, if only in a jesting manner. Those earthy glances she got sometimes in the bus from men old enough to know better!

Fury rescued her. Her voice thick but bridling, she spoke. " If you don't leave my house this instant," she declared, " I'll call the police."

At once she was aware of the fatuity of this: no telephone, and the nearest neighbour hopelessly beyond the range of the loudest scream.

Slowly, unalarmed, the man turned his head on the pillow. Bessie's free hand, opening and closing, clutched her satin dress. She still held the lamp; otherwise she might have sunk to the floor. But her legs buckled somewhat.

" William . . ." she stammered.

Her husband looked at her with assessing curiosity, a square-headed man with hard, unblinking eyes and a mouth become tightened as though from driving ruthless business transactions.

"What's that you said about the police?" he asked, still not budging from under the covers.

"I'll . . . I'll call them," she panted.

"Shouldn't think you'd want to do that." He spoke with slow exactitude, but mildly, incommoded. "There's only one in the village, I expect, and *he* wouldn't be used to a case like this—not in these nice, respectable parts." His steady eyes, not moving from her, shone greenish in the lamplight. "Sit down, Bessie," he suggested. "Unless you're coming into bed?"

He watched her turn and, with the slow, waddling movements of a person exercising will-power after the petrifaction of a shock, walk to the high chest of drawers and place the lamp on it.

"What did you think was in your bed?" he asked, entirely without amusement. "A wolf?" And suddenly, rapidly, he flung back the bed covers and leapt out, a short, solid-fleshed man of mature cast, with strong thick arms; he filled, with comfortable tightness, the striped shirt he had left on.

Bessie shrank back a step, clutching the bodice of her dress, her eyes bared. But he did not touch her. He only locked the door, drew out the key, and leapt back into bed, thrusting the key under the farther pillow.

"Brrrh, it's warmer in here," he said. "A pity you haven't got a stove in the room."

She had watched with the strained inertia of someone hopelessly lost in a no-man's-land of mist. Then, carefully lowering herself, she sat on a hard chair placed against the wall where the chest stood.

A little heat, perhaps sufficient for a doll's house, came from the lamp. The room was very cold. Something drastic had happened. The sitting-room downstairs, the three hours of cosy drinking, already seemed remote. Her mind kept on fumbling towards realization, but, so far, all she felt was that a great black thundercloud had suddenly clamped down on the pretty cottage. She no longer looked at the man in the bed.

He was saying something about having come in by the backdoor after keeping watch on the house for hours . . . helping himself to bread and cheese in the kitchen . . . examining the layout of the house with a torch.

She made an effort to clear a way through the muddle in her mind. "How did you find where I was living?" she whispered, at last. The ordinaryness of the inquiry seemed to reassure her. His presence was perfectly acceptable and, somehow, logical. But still she did not look at him, only stared in turn at the wardrobe, at the dressing-table and, finally, up at the gently burning little lamp, as though seeing them for the first time.

" Took me a long time to track down a pal of yours," William replied. Perhaps because of his success in this, he even sounded affable. " She's in furs now, wholesale house in Cardiff; I expect you know about that. Cost me a four-quid dinner in the Angel to make her slip the bit of information—pretending she wasn't slipping it, of course." He eased up, and gave the pillow a pugilist's blow. " You shouldn't have written her asking for that twenty quid you lent her, Bessie. You must have been drunk when you did it."

She bridled a little. " I don't get drunk."

" No? Well, it was your tightness about money, then." He chuckled, with a queer, throaty sound she had never heard from him before. He was not a man given to jokes.

" Wait till I get hold of Monica! " she said, her voice too unrecovered for vindictiveness.

" You won't," William said.

She bent her head as though the strength of her neck had dwindled. There was a long silence, and when finally she spoke, her sluggishness suggested a lack of interest in or focus on what she was asking. " Have you still got the restaurant? "

" No. Sold it months ago. Been on the prowl since then." He stretched, and snuggled down like any married man in bed at home. The heaving eiderdown shone luxuriously warm. " Got a fair price from a firm of multiple caterers for the premises. They said the goodwill of the business wasn't worth much—your fault, Bessie."

She said nothing and, calm in his deductions although his tone seemed to imply long and bitter reveries, presently he went on: " If you'd put the money you had from your Uncle Charles—and I bet he's boiling in hell at the thought *you* got it—if you'd put it into the restaurant we'd soon have been well off, Bess. That scheme to build a factory estate outside Bylau has got going; the Government is encouraging it. Bylau town is going to be a big noise in a couple of years or so."

She drew her feet, which were getting cold, under her skirt. " Why didn't you hold on to the premises, then? "

There was a long pause before he replied. " I lost interest in the business. I got sour, Bessie, see? When I'd go down in the morning to let Sally and Mrs. Bevan in and notice them looking at me sideways, wondering about my state of temper—well, I got to hate myself, too. After you did a bunk from me I took to staying at home all on my own .... night after night."

In his voice was all the bleak solitude of the home over the restaurant, all the deserted silence of the small-town street after the shops closed.

" You used to go to meet the Chamber of Commerce men in The White Hart often enough, leaving me at home," she reminded him.

" You drove me out, with your moods. You could have kept me at your side, loving as a silly spaniel." Still he sounded only mildly concerned with all that now. " After you bunked off, leaving that note of three lines on the mantelpiece, I couldn't get myself to go to The White Hart any more, knowing how all the boys would push drinks on me and slap me on the back, cheerful as a lot of undertakers . . . But the money, Bessie, the money! If you had run off *before* you got the solicitor's letter about your uncle's money, it wouldn't have been quite so bad. The thought of the money stuck in my gullet. We could have used that money well, and in ten years you'd have had your jewellery and sables, and ride about fat as a duchess. But no! you wanted the legacy all to yourself. Yourself, yourself."

She didn't like his further chuckle. Although stupor still held her body inert, her mind formulated a clear little patch of opinion. Sounding detached from any wish to give offence, she began: " I hated Bylau, and you could not have made the restaurant into anything. You're a fighter, I dare say, but you just can't think *big*. You're not the master type, William; you haven't got the employer's temperament. Those two waitresses used to laugh at you. After being in a large drapery business for fifteen years, I know what's what in bosses—" She stopped, dimly aware of incautiousness.

" A good woman," he replied to this, only a shade censorious, " ought to try to make a man feel larger, not smaller. You're a mean and selfish woman, Bessie. One of the kind that only wants a man to keep her in comfort and expects it as her right—amen and no two opinions about it."

They were approaching the old trouble, the ancient warfare, the eternal trap.

" I'm as God made me," she found herself mumbling. For some reason she remembered hearing, in a Welsh wireless talk on bygone courting customs, how a couple would be sewn inside a canvas sack together by the girl's parents and left all night as a test of mutual suitability.

For the first time, his voice betrayed a dark, glowering anger. " I wonder what we have schools and upbringing for? Did God set out purposely to make you a humbug, a liar, a greedy hypocrite, and a thief? Do you think I didn't know how you used to help yourself to money in the restaurant till and spend it in Cardiff on flighty clothes that you said you got at wholesale price? Ha! always wanting to play the lady in Bylau, you shifty bitch! "

She did not deal with this. It seemed unimportant and normal beside the fact of his presence and the key under the pillow; unimportant, even, in comparison with the fact of her defunct feet and the moribund apathy of faculties elsewhere in her body.

The room was getting colder. Or had something else reduced her stamina—shock and fear? Whisky was fraudulent; there might be something in the belief that ale gave one more lasting warmth and energy. For a moment she contemplated placing the lamp at her feet. But she lacked the initiative for the act; a rigid unwillingness to budge from the chair against the wall governed her. If she made a movement, he would spring. She sat with arms folded across her chest as if to retain the last warmth there, and still she did not look directly at him, though her eyes sidled now and again in the direction of the bed.

The further silence was even longer than the others. She broke it. Again in that reminding but not conciliatory way, she said, "I didn't run off with another man. It's that they usually get cross about."

He replied in the reflective manner of a man who has dwelt with long deliberation on a problem or scheme but will not reveal his final decisions until the time is ripe. "It would have been better if you *had* run off with another chap. It was just plain, cold, murdering selfishness."

She preferred the abusive anger, and resumed, "I can't think why you were so fond of me. *I* didn't run after *you*. I never thought you much of a catch. You got me when I had a nasty row over pay with the firm I worked for in Cardiff, the tykes. You're no handsome oil-painting, William—" Again she stopped, vaguely astonished at herself. Did she *want* him to spring?

That peculiar chuckle! He had developed into a different person, calculating, uncharacteristically voluble, chuckling to himself. Had he gone off his head? Why hadn't he called at the front door in the normal way? The strange calculation of his trick struck her forcibly now. He had gone mad! She moved uncomfortably, and the chair creaked.

"Getting cold out there? Warm enough in here!"

"I'm all right," she mumbled.

"That's the worst of getting yourself an outlandish cottage for a bolt-hole—no heating in the bedroom when a thing like this happens. Never mind, you won't be catching a chill or influenza."

As though rejecting what her ears heard, she stared more fixedly into space. A fancy preoccupied her that the veins of her feet had stiffened into sprays of icicles and it was impossible to walk. But her mind kept on making efforts to grapple with

subjects suitable and, indeed, necessary for discussion. Anything to break those prolonged silences which were laden with something undeclared.

After a while, she resumed: " You doted on me too much, William. Your doting got on my nerves. I don't think I like men. I ought to have married a retired old man who just wanted not to die alone."

A further fancy came to her that but for the stupefying cruelty of the cold it would be pleasant and fruitful to sit talking like this all through the night.

Matters could be wound up, bankruptcy declared void, pacified contestants make amicable farewells.

But William ignored her last observations. He asked, " What do you do with yourself all day in this place? "

" Nothing." She answered as if glad of his apparently sociable inquiry. " At first I thought I'd stay only a few months. I wanted to think. All my life I promised myself a time to myself; no nagging employer—or anyone else, for that matter—to answer to. I kept on trying to make up my mind to go to Susan in Australia. But somehow I couldn't make the move—"

" Ah! " he said, and chuckled.

" I eat well, and take a little whisky some evenings. I keep an afternoon maid. I listen to good-class concerts and lectures on the wireless. The weeks go by . . ." The sloth of the slow, eventless days lay in her trailing-away voice.

" You mean you came here to guzzle. Australia, my Aunt Fanny! True, you've got a lot of the gipsy in you. I'm not saying that's a nasty thing—it can make a woman shine out and get a man on the go. I bet when you'd guzzled your way through that legacy you'd have set about hooking some well-off fellow in these parts. You know all right there's some chaps that *like* being hooked and done down."

" I intend going back to the drapery when the money is gone," she said meekly.

" Isn't there some old buffer running after you here? I see you've got a lot of your looks left."

At this, she turned her head and gazed at him. His eyes were fixed on her as if they had never moved away. He had placed the vacant pillow on top of his own, so that his head was propped up: he looked comfortable and warm, but relentlessly wide awake, the greenish glint of his eyes clear and hard.

She said, " If you've come here thinking of a divorce, William, there isn't anyone to name. But I won't give you any trouble. I deserted you."

A glimmer of eagerness had struggled into her face.

" I don't want a divorce. No need for all that fuss and expense. Not now."

Her mouth opened to ask the obvious question, but she only looked at him, glassily. No exchange passed between their eyes. But now she could barely discern his head. Was the cold disabling her sight?

She sat in slow, laborious pondering. Why was he there? It no longer seemed shocking that he had arrived, with such dramatic calculation, in her bed. But why, why? She accepted the actual fact of his presence now—even, she fumblingly thought, welcomed it. The two dormant past years were smashed, and the thing that fugitively haunted her had taken on, at last, concrete stature and power. She looked towards the bed as a homeless wanderer might look through a window into a firelit room.

" Come in," he said, as if aware.

She did not reply. But, draggingly, she shook her head, before turning it, with an automaton's movement, away from the hazed bed. A few moments later the lamp began to fade. The oil usually sufficed her preparations for bed over three or four nights. " If you give me the key," she said, quivering out of the passivity at this, " I'll fetch oil from the can in the kitchen."

" No, Bessie."

Her remaining vestiges of warmth and strength seemed to ebb with the sinking light. She couldn't even bring herself to get up and fetch coats and other garments from the wardrobe to swathe herself in. Neither could her mind dwell on the refusal of the key; *that* threatened to raise a gigantic issue it was best not to think about.

Almost there was a sense of release, an elusive, lapping seduction, in her resolution not to move from the chair. I'll be found in the morning frozen to death, she thought. In the flickering light the furniture began to look insubstantial, withdrawing its familiar identity; the dressing-table mirror became lifeless, an oval for ghosts to look in.

The last edge of blue on the lamp-wick vanished. She was surprised to find herself saying, at once, conversational, " I often sit downstairs in the dark when the lamp goes out and I can't be bothered to fill it. I sit thinking. Living alone here has cured me of fright. It isn't as if you're a stranger."

William said nothing. He was not a stranger. All people were strangers in the dark.

At the window, where the curtains were only half drawn, an anonymous greyness seeped in but did not reach any object in the room. The last links with fact and reality were broken. There

was not the faintest sound from the frozen world outside. All natural things were cast into the abeyance of this deepest and darkest hour.

Was it midnight? What did it matter? Time mattered no more. The only thing existing, yet still remaining a mystery, was the unseen element of judgment in the room; she recognized it fully now and waited for it to declare itself. It belonged to the dark.

She found herself saying, as if testingly, " You were silly to feel disgrace when I left you. A woman that runs off like that is a good riddance. The Chamber of Commerce men would realize that, I expect."

He said nothing. Had he fallen asleep? Buried his ears under the covers? She could hear no breathing. Oh, if only he hurled a heap more of abuse! Even the daft chuckle would be better than this silence.

Now and again her knees gave little convulsive jerks, as if making protest on their own account. The savage cold left her no dominion at all over her body. Yet her mind, detached from her body, seemed to become clear of its confusion.

She heard her own voice from a distance. " William . . . if you've come wondering . . . if I'll go back to you . . . it will need some talking . . . thinking about." In her chest a dead sort of pain followed the hard breathing necessary to get the words out.

Still there was no reply. Her head swerved from the direction of the hidden bed to the greyness at the window space. She thought of the bereft foothills and, beyond, the Brecknock Beacons impregnable with marble snow. All the world was pinioned in stony silence.

If only she could hear the soft thud of a pine cone falling into the withered ferns of the garden! Loneliness, oblivion, and freezing death were all about her. Hours must pass before a small, dim glimmer would crack the night.

When her mouth opened again it felt grotesquely not her own. " William . . ." Her lower jaw seemed to lock.

She sat pondering.

Blue, blue . . . why did she think of a blue, sun-curled sea with foam swirling on a picnic beach? Tenby! The day-trip she took to Tenby last summer . . . She saw a florist's shop filled with riotous blooms of July: roses, sweet peas, zinnias, carnations. In a café a sundae heaped with nuts and marshmallow cream was placed before her. A man with a sports-club crest on his blue blazer lowered a newspaper and eyed her from a face brown as a football. She wore a cerise dress and bought a hat that day.

Tenby was a good-class town; not like rough, coal-mining Bylau, where a lady couldn't really be a lady. Her cheekbones

began twitching. Tenby vanished. Even the grey window space had gone. Her body gave a long, dislocated jerk; she was aware of it from afar.

Why was she on her feet? She did not remember getting up. Had he spoken? There was no sense of sound about her, and her eyeballs gained nothing from the dark. But she knew now where she must go. Carefully, laboriously, her feet moved. She trudged without a bending of her knees. Her body moved as towards a command, blindly but without error. Her knee pressed against the bed.

" Come in," he chuckled.

She heard the poplin swish of the thrown-back eiderdown. A faint eddy of warmth touched her face briefly. She fell into the opened bed, in all her clothes. The covers closed round her. But the warmth did nothing for her.

When he put the pillow over her face she quivered only once. The long silent apathy of the past two years contracted into a massive strength of obliteration, and, acquiescent, she sank under it.

Light, a pure morning light, was seeping into her eyes. But she could not see it clearly. A pillow was on her face. Pulling it away—why was it there?—she sat up in astonishment. A shaft of sunlight came from the space between the curtains. For long moments, her mouth open like a startled child's, she remained looking down at the man beside her in the warm bed.

He lay fast asleep, mouth open too, a patina of sweat on the short, thickly-rooted nose. For the first time, she recognized his nose as a pugnacious one. The wart on his chin somehow made him seem less sternly menacing.

Stealthily, keeping concentrated watch on his face, she slid a flat hand under his pillow. Then, with long pauses, she eased herself out of the bed. Her body, already wonderfully thawed, felt abounding as she stood safely on the woollen rug. She shook herself down like a dusty fowl: the black satin dress hung badly creased.

Her eyes did not move from William's face as she backed to the door. She unlocked and opened the door without noise, gave William a last look, and crept out.

When she returned, she carried a tray which held a teapot, two cups, and a plate of biscuits. The night's residue of sloth was off her powdered face; her hair was tidied. She placed the tray on the bedside table and stood looking at William's far-gone face yet again, before crossing to the window.

Brass rings clanged briskly as she flung back the curtains as

far as they would go, releasing into the room the full crisp morning. It was still very cold, and the light, spinning back from the dazzling frost in the garden, had the fiery bounce of diamonds. Night's claustrophobic assembly of threats had slunk away and the morning rang alive with victory.

"*William!*" At once she reduced the hectoring shout. "William!" There was something abridged, if not obsequious, in her gait and manner as she went to the tray and poured the tea. "Another cold morning, William!"

She did not look at him now. But she fetched a purplish silk wrap from the wardrobe and, as Clytemnestra flung the net over the warrior returned from Troy, wrapped it round his shoulders. William, still a bit manacled in his heavy sleep, struggled up in the bed. Bessie fetched a pink woollen cardigan for herself.

As he took the cup of tea from her hand he glanced at her from under swollen lids. He was always a thick sleeper. She shook out that other pillow, gave it a pronounced scrutiny, and placed it behind his shoulders.

Bemused, he looked into the cup. "There's nothing in it except tea," she assured him. "I've got no use for rat poison. When I want to get rid of you I'll shoot you like a dog."

She tittered from the corner of her mouth as she crossed with her own cup to the chair on which such hours of agony had been endured the night before. William tasted the tea. Bessie swallowed two good mouthfuls herself and, after a silence which seemed neutral, she asked, "How much did you get for the restaurant from those multiple caterers?"

"Five thousand pounds for the lease of the premises; seven hundred for the contents." They were his first words. Had he returned to his old surly meagreness of speech?

"Why, William, that's not at all bad! Judging by the way you talked last night, anyone would think you had a grudge. You must have fought them like a man."

He glanced at her sideways. Something lurked in his face; it did not suggest it had to do with smiling. "What time is it?" he asked abruptly, and looked at the soft felt hat still hanging on the ebony bedpost.

"About half past eight. Plenty of time yet. You'll have to go by two o'clock. A woman from the village comes then. I'm supposed to be a widow."

"I'm not going," he said slowly.

She did not deal with this. "I took a day-trip to Tenby last summer," she began, "and I thought if William had adventure in him, this is a nice place to open a restaurant. I like seaside places .... What's the matter with you?" she suddenly challenged

across the room. " Can't you look me straight in the eye? "

He looked her straight in the eye. His thick, hard neck and square head lunged out from the purple wrap, and he growled, " You can count yourself lucky you're sitting there drinking tea in comfort, like a bloody hypocrite sozzling after a funeral."

" Now, William! " Bessie reproved, not without admiration dipping in her voice. " Language! "

They drank their tea. Presently, ruminative, he said, " The thought crossed my mind to do you in."

" Well, you tried to, William." She swallowed the last drop of tea. " I could have you up for attempted murder, William."

He looked with curiosity into the sharp blaze of light at the window. " Something suddenly broke inside me," he said. " I went to sleep."

" In your way," Bessie said, placing her empty cup on the floor, " you're a good man, William. I intend coming back to you."

" Do I want you? " Curiosity still mused in his voice.

" Yes, William. Otherwise you wouldn't have sold the restaurant and gone to such trouble to nose me out here. I like a man to show spirit."

Her hand gave a large gesture, but the characteristic heave of her bosom was a curtailed one. " It was romantic, William—you breaking in here, just for me! It's like Romeo and Juliet! Last night, when I came in that door with the lamp and found it was you in the bed I felt myself going double my size . . . Though I did go weak in the knees, too," she said, in afterthought. " I never thought you had it in you, William."

" Now," he said, staring into his empty cup as though it might reveal the future, " you know what I've got in me."

" Yes, William," she replied, soberly. " I do."

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CRUSHING REJOINDER

It would be inappropriate to recall all the stories about infuriated cooks brandishing kitchen knives, and enraged diners throwing plates on the floor; but I must recall one short and exquisite story about a poet who was also something of a gourmet. He was Walter Savage Landor: he was giving a luncheon in his villa in Florence: early springtime; his garden was just coming into bloom outside. But the main dish at luncheon was a failure. Landor summoned the cook and upbraided him. The cook answered back, angrily. Landor seized him and threw him out of the window. And then, in agony, he cried, " Oh heavens, I forgot the violets! "

GILBERT HIGHET, *People, Places, and Books*

Danger Money

By Arthur Gordon

THIS was it, Kirk Halliday thought, feeling the tension mount inside him. The moment that would spell success or failure. The moment when the trap, so carefully set and baited, was ready to be sprung.

He crouched lower, narrowing his eyes against the afternoon glare of the street outside, feeling the perspiration trickle down his back. He shifted the camera slightly and adjusted the tripod, then checked the telephoto lens again. Everything would depend, ultimately, on a few feet of 16-millimetre film. He did not want any vibration, any blurring of focus to spoil it.

For the twentieth time in the last half hour he glanced at his wristwatch. Three-fifty-seven. In exactly three minutes, now, the telephone would ring in the dingy house across the street. Gardella would answer it, would get the urgent message. He would not question its validity—why should he? He would come out of the house, fast. He would walk quickly—perhaps he would run—to the car parked at the kerb. He would not know that across the street the merciless eye of a camera was watching him, recording every move. Even if Gardella looked directly at the window, Kirk knew, he would see nothing. Just a blind pulled down in a front room of another of Tampa's cheap boarding-houses. A blind pulled *almost* down. And then . . .

Three-fifty-eight. With a quick, nervous gesture, Kirk stubbed out his cigarette. He was a strongly built young man with steady grey eyes and sand-coloured hair bleached lighter on top by the fierce Florida sun. An easy-going man, a man who liked people, a family man. This was a strange role that he found himself playing. But it was too late to back out of it now.

He glanced once behind him. Two nights he had spent in this

shabby room, alone except for the cockroaches. Two nights and part of two days, posing as a salesman, familiarizing himself with Gardella's habits, watching him come and go, learning where he parked his car, stalking him as if he were an animal.

Three-fifty-nine. Kirk felt an unfamiliar dryness in his mouth, a hollowness just beneath his belt buckle. He was a salesman, not a hunter. There was no exhilaration for him in tracking down a quarry. But he had made a bargain, a bargain with Jerry Gillem. He was determined to go through with it.

While the hand swung inexorably around the second-dial of his watch he relived the whole episode from its innocent beginning to its disastrous ending . . .

Andy Solomon, who ran the ironmonger's shop in the little Gulf Coast town, had phoned and asked him to a stag poker party. He hadn't been particularly eager to go; he seldom played poker, and played it rather badly.

But Tay had encouraged him—lovely Tay, dark-haired Tay. Taylor Halliday, the woman he loved, his wife, the mother of their child. Tay had said, " Oh, go on, Kirk, it'll do you good to pretend you're a bachelor again."

Then she had pulled his hair and added, " But just for one

evening, my fine-feathered friend. And if you're not home by 2 a.m., I'll come after you . . ."

So he had gone. He had had a whisky or two, he had enjoyed himself—for a while. Then something had happened to his luck. It wasn't that he held poor cards: on the contrary, he held good ones. So good that he didn't see how he could lose. But every time the jackpot was large enough to matter, someone else was holding five cards just a shade better than his own.

The stakes weren't excessively high, but by midnight, Kirk had lost nearly a hundred dollars. All the fun went out of it, then. Nobody was enjoying it, really. They extended the deadline, trying to give Kirk a chance to recover. In the final hand he was dealt three sixes, then drew a pair of aces. An ace-high full house. He betted enough to recoup his losses—and more.

Then Jerry Gillem, the insurance adjuster, laid down a hand with four sevens in it.

"Kirk," he said, "I'm embarrassed. Really I am."

And Kirk had said grimly, "It's my own funeral, Jerry. I'll have to write you a cheque." He had written the cheque, feeling sick at heart.

There it went, the money he had saved for Tay's birthday present, the money to redecorate the nursery, the money for the next payment on the car. There it went, money he hadn't got, really wouldn't have until his next commissions came in. It had never happened before, and, Kirk promised himself, it certainly would never happen again. But it had happened this time.

Just as he was about to climb into his car, Jerry Gillem came up and stood beside him in the starlight. "Kirk," he said, "I'd like your permission to tear up this cheque. I don't need it. You do." Kirk shook his head. A man had to pay his debts, whether it hurt or not.

And then Jerry said, with a sudden excitement in his voice, "I've got an idea, Kirk. How'd you like to earn it back?"

"Earn it?"

"Yes. Look, Kirk, I've got a case I'm supposed to investigate over in Tampa. Looks like a routine thing, an open-and-shut case of fraud. The trouble is, I don't want to be in Tampa these next few days. I want to be in Miami. A girl I know in New York is coming down to Miami for a few days, and . . . Well, you know how it is. Now, if you'd stand in for me in Tampa, nobody'd be any the wiser. The fee I'd get is just about the equivalent of this cheque of yours. I'd just hand your own cheque back to you! How about it?"

Kirk said, "But I don't know anything about investigating insurance frauds."

"You wouldn't have to! I'd fix the whole thing up for you before heading for Miami. As a salesman, your time is your own, isn't it? You could drive over and meet me in Tampa tomorrow?"

Kirk had hesitated. It was—well, it was somewhat irregular. But it was not dishonest. And it was a way out. A way to retrieve this stupid mistake. He said slowly, "But I don't know what to tell Tay."

"Tell her you have some new prospects over in Tampa. Tell her you're going fishing for a few days at Bocagrande. Tell her any old thing. What difference does it make?"

The difference, Kirk thought, was that he had never lied to Tay, and didn't want to start now. But he didn't want to tell her about his poker losses, either. Abruptly, he had come to a decision. "All right, Jerry," he'd said. "It's a deal."

In a church tower not far from the boarding-house, a musty-throated bell chimed four times. Kirk felt his muscles tighten.

Through the view-finder of the camera he could see every detail of the doorway opposite: the cracked and peeling paint, the vivid purple of the unkempt bougainvillaea vine that trailed across the sagging porch. These cockroach-haunted houses were on the edge of Ybor City, the old Spanish quarter of Tampa. Here you heard staccato Cuban spoken more often than English. Here lived cigar-factory workers, dock workers, sailors, drifters—all the human backwash of a seaport.

The door of the house opened suddenly. Kirk's tense finger increased its pressure; the camera whirred. But it was not Gardella.

It was a small man in a shabby suit, a dirty Panama hat pulled down over his eyes. He came to the edge of the porch, raised his head, hesitated. For half a second, it seemed to Kirk that he was looking straight into the lens of the camera. He ducked his head again, but not before Kirk saw that he was some kind of Oriental. He walked quickly down to the street, looked left and right, then moved away.

Kirk drew his arm across his forehead. It came away wet. So it was not Gardella. All right. He had seen other people go in and out of the house: small, furtive men who looked like Cubans, a couple of the tawdry women not hard to find in a place like this. They were no concern of his; he was interested only in Gardella.

Gardella was inside, he was sure of that. Gardella would be answering the phone, now. Gardella would accept the bait, would fall into the trap. According to Jerry Gillem, the trick had worked successfully in the past; there was no reason why it should not work now.

When they met in Tampa as agreed, Jerry had shown Kirk the file on Gardella. All the details were in a single folder. Alonzo Gardella, proprietor of a paintshop in Ybor City, claimed to have been seriously injured by a taxi late at night in front of one of Tampa's lesser hotels. He was making a claim against the taxi company for twenty-five thousand dollars. Only one witness: the hotel commissionaire—a type, Jerry said, who would swear to anything for fifty dollars and a percentage of the rake-off.

Oh yes, the folder contained everything. A statement from the taxi-driver insisting that he had been proceeding slowly and carefully, that Gardella had walked into his bumper, had deliberately got himself knocked down. Letters from Gardella claimed serious injury to his spine and were backed up by X-rays and medical testimony. The taxi company was protected by liability insurance—that same insurance being issued by the company Jerry Gillem represented.

The insurance company had checked the nation-wide index of persons with a suspiciously high percentage of "accidents." Nothing there about anyone named Alonzo Gardella. Even so, with that amount of money involved, they had ordered Jerry to investigate. They would pay any legitimate claim, pay it willingly. But they had to be constantly on guard against fraud.

Jerry had already checked up on Gardella, had found him to be a shadowy figure with no solid connections, no verifiable past. The paintshop existed, but it was shabby, and did little business—it might be cover for almost any kind of illegal activity.

As for the alleged injuries, Jerry and Kirk had called on the Tampa doctor who had signed the medical statement. They found him to be young, redheaded, aggressive, transparently honest, and wholeheartedly on the side of the underdog, which was what he considered Gardella to be.

"What are you trying to do?" he had demanded. "Keep the poor devil from collecting the compensation he deserves?"

"Just checking, doctor," Jerry had said easily. "We just want to be sure."

"Look, Mr. Gillem," the doctor said. "I saw the X-rays, and X-rays don't lie."

"He brought them with him, didn't he? I mean, you didn't take them yourself, did you?"

"Why, no. But they showed the injury plainly. They . . ."

"I'm sure they did," Jerry said dryly. "But what proof have you that the injured spine you saw in the X-rays really belongs to our friend Gardella?"

He paused, watching the young doctor's startled face. Then he said, "In a town of this size, there's always at least one so-

called lawyer who can supply you with ' proof ' of just about any type of injury you care to name . . . in return for a share of the money you plan to collect. X-rays like that have fooled a lot of juries. I don't want 'em to fool one more."

" If what you say is true," the doctor said stiffly, " I'll withdraw my testimony. I'll . . ."

" All you have to do," Jerry said, " is tell me one thing. With the type of injury he claims to have, could Gardella do any heavy work? Any strenuous lifting, for example? "

" Certainly not! He'd be in constant pain. He could hobble around—maybe drive a car. But that's about all."

" Thanks, doctor," Jerry had said with a grin. " That's all we need to know."

The rest had been easy. Following Jerry's instructions, Kirk had taken this room opposite the house where Gardella lived. The Cuban landlord, a surly, ferret-faced character, had claimed at first that his front rooms were occupied. A ten-dollar bill had taken care of that: the previous occupant was rapidly evicted. A little discreet investigation showed that it was Gardella's habit to take a siesta during the heat of the day, leaving the paintshop in the care of an assistant. He always parked his car in front of the house.

That was the ruse: to bait the trap with the victim's car. It was a device Jerry had used successfully in a recent case where his exposure of the fraud had won him a bonus. He described it graphically to Kirk: an ice-pick driven through a front tyre, an urgent phone call reporting a faked emergency, then a film, taken by a concealed camera, showing a man who claimed to have lost the use of his right arm hastily and efficiently changing the tyre, with both hands! When Jerry had shown that film in court, the case against his company had collapsed.

" Now you're on your own, boy," he said to Kirk. " You've got my camera and you know what to do with it. I'll spend two nights in Miami; then I'll report back here. If you get what we need sooner, just go on home. Good luck—and good hunting! "

And Kirk had said wryly, " The same to you."

After Jerry's departure, he had decided not to rely on the flat-tyre trick. For one thing, he shrank from inflicting damage on another person's property, even if the person was a crook. For another, here in the grimy heart of the city, it would be too easy for Gardella to take a taxi, or even decide to walk. So Kirk had thought up a variation, enlisting the aid of a friend of his, Jim Burroughs, who worked for a local construction company.

He had impressed on Jim the necessity for secrecy and split-second timing. At three-fifty, one of Jim's lorries was to coast

slowly down the street. As it passed Gardella's car, three or four heavy concrete building-blocks were to fall off as if by accident so that the parked car was hemmed in by them. Each of those blocks weighed sixty or seventy pounds: an able-bodied man could move them easily. But not a man with an injured spine.

At four o'clock exactly, Jim was to phone Gardella. " Tell him there's been a hold-up at his paintshop," Kirk had said. " Tell him his clerk has been shot, that he's wanted there immediately. And then hang up. I'll do the rest—with the camera."

At three-fifty the lorry had come through, dead on schedule. At three-fifty-one it was gone, leaving Gardella's car neatly blocked. By now, the phone call should have been completed.

Across the street, suddenly, the door swung open. A man came out quickly into the hot, white sunshine. There was no mistaking that bulky body, that moon-face, that sparse black hair.

Kirk's finger tightened; the whir of the camera filled the room. A low, steady growl—not loud. But loud enough to drown any other small sound.

No thought of interference crossed Kirk's mind. All his attention was concentrated on keeping Gardella centred in the view-finder as he came quickly down the steps, as he opened the car door, as he hesitated, seeing the concrete blocks.

For perhaps two seconds Gardella stood there, motionless. Then he closed the car door and moved towards the nearest obstruction. Kirk kept the camera trained on him. Ten more feet of film and he would have all the evidence Jerry needed to expose another fraud. Eight more feet. Six . . .

Kirk heard no warning sound. He did not feel the blow. It was as if an inky blackness suddenly appeared at the four corners of the rectangle made by the view-finder, spread instantly to the centre, then filled the whole room. The camera was snatched from him, but he did not know it. He fell forward against the window sill, unconscious.

The man who had slugged Kirk Halliday moved back a pace. He stood looking down, his ferret face full of a malevolent satisfaction. It was the Cuban boarding-house keeper, the man who —for ten extra dollars—had let the room to Kirk.

In his right hand he held a short piece of lead pipe wrapped with rubber tubing. In his left was the camera with the telephoto lens that Kirk had been using. Kirk had slumped forward against the window sill. Warily, the Cuban reached out one foot and gave him a push, holding the cosh ready. But another blow was not necessary. Kirk rolled limply onto the floor.

The Cuban put the crude blackjack into his hip pocket. He

eyed the camera curiously for a moment then placed it beside the unconscious man. With thumb and forefinger, he opened one of Kirk's eyes, then put his ear to his shirtfront, and listened. Satisfied, he stood up, crossed the room, and went out.

In less than a minute he was back with a length of clothes-line and a roll of adhesive tape. He dragged his victim over to the bed, and, with an effort, hoisted him onto it. He tied Kirk's hands behind him, bound his feet securely, taped his mouth shut, and ran a strip of tape across his eyes.

He picked up Kirk's suitcase. Into it he threw all his victim's possessions. The last item he put in was the camera. He closed the lid, fastened the locks, and straightened up. He walked over to the bound man on the bed, tested the tension in the cords that held him. Then he went out quickly, closing the door and locking it from the outside.

A moment later he came out of the house. He lit a thin black cigar. In front of the house opposite, a broad-shouldered workman was loading the concrete building-blocks into a wheelbarrow. The Cuban walked up to him. " Gardella inside? "

The workman shook his head. " Gone down to the shop in a big hurry. Some sort of trouble down there."

The Cuban looked at the blocks. " What's all this? "

The workman shrugged. " Fell off a lorry, seems like. Had Mr. Gardella's car blocked. He couldn't move 'em, 'cause of his back hurtin' him so bad. So he hollered for me to help him."

The Cuban snorted sceptically. " His back's not that bad." Reflectively, he blew some cigar smoke into the humid air and nodded towards the house. " Grimes in there? "

" Don't know for sure."

The Cuban tossed his cigar away. He went up to the door, and rang the bell. A woman's voice said sharply, " Who is it? "

" Lopez. I have to see Grimes. It's important."

The door was opened by a girl with blue-black hair, and dark eyes. She said insolently, " What's so important about it? "

The Cuban reached out and patted her cheek. " I'll tell that to Grimes, chiquita."

She slapped his hand away. " He's in the cellar." She moved away down the dim hall, swinging her hips.

The Cuban watched her, smiling sardonically. When she was out of sight, he opened a door and descended a steep flight of steps. At the bottom he hesitated, wrinkling his nostrils: the air had a stale smell, as of animals caged or human beings crowded into too small a space for too long a time. Around the walls were tiers of bunks, all empty.

At the far end of the cellar, under a dangling electric-light bulb,

a huge man in a peaked cap sat at a table. In front of him was a metal strong-box, open. Beside the box was a bottle, and beside the bottle a glass half full of amber liquid.

The big man pushed back his cap, and light slanted down across his meaty, sunburnt face. He said roughly, " Who let you in here, Lopez? "

The Cuban moved forward with his light step. " I was looking for your partner, Captain. But perhaps you're the man I ought to see. I have a little offer to make."

The big man drained the glass. He was drunk, but it showed only in his eyes. " Gardella handles this end of the business. All I do is run the boat. You know that. Now go peddle your phoney papers somewhere else."

Lopez pulled a chair close to the table and sat down astride it. " I'm not peddling visas, capitan mio. I'm selling something I think you'll be very glad to get. That is, if we can agree on a price."

Grimes tilted the bottle so that more whisky slopped into the glass. " What are you trying to say, Lopez? "

" That I have a camera for sale. A very excellent camera. A camera I'm sure you'd like very much."

" A *camera*? Are you crazy? "

" Why, no, Captain," Lopez said softly. He hitched the chair forward. " Now let me tell you why . . ."

Slowly, painfully, in the house across the street, Kirk Halliday came back to consciousness. His head throbbed unbearably; the tape across his mouth and eyes gave him a suffocating feeling of being buried alive. For hours, it seemed to him, he hovered in a twilight world of nausea and pain where there was no past and no future, only a terrifying present that made no sense. But at last the fog rolled away and he remembered where he was and how he came to be there.

With a groan, he raised himself to a sitting position and swung his legs over the side of the bed. He tried to stand up, lost his balance, and went down on his face with a crash that seemed to shake the whole house.

For a moment he lay there motionless, the smell of dust in his nostrils, the ropes cutting deeply into his wrists and ankles. Outside, a car went by with a swish of tyres. A moment later he heard the church clock strike five times. He had been unconscious for almost an hour.

He rolled over on his back and sat up. With the tips of his fingers he could feel the outline of his wallet in his hip pocket. Apparently it was undisturbed. But if robbery was not his

assailant's motive, then what was? Who had knocked him out? why was he trussed up like this, voiceless, blind, helpless?

Only one thing was clear: somehow, the hunter had become the hunted. He had set a trap for Gardella and it had snapped shut—on himself.

Abrupt and unbidden, there came to his mind a mental image of his home in the little town seventy miles away. Tay would be in the kitchen, now, getting the child's supper ready. Tay, his wife, who had believed him when he said he was going on a fishing trip that might last several days. Tay, lovely Tay . . .

A wave of emotion, half panic, half fury, swept over him. He had to get back to her, he *had* to. He rolled across the floor until he encountered a wall. Then, drawing up his knees, he delivered a succession of resounding blows against it with his heels.

He did not have to wait long. Almost at once he heard the lock click, the door open. A sardonic voice said, " You must have a thick skull, amigo, to be so lively so soon! "

Hands gripped his shoulders; he felt himself dragged back to the bed and propped against it. In a moment, a noose of some kind was slipped over his head and drawn tight. The voice said, " There, if you stay quiet, you will be able to breathe. But if you persist in moving around, you will choke yourself. Just be patient until it grows dark. Then we will take a little ride together, you and I."

The almost soundless footsteps receded. The door closed, the key turned. Silence sang again in the room.

Kirk leaned forward; instantly the noose tightened. He sat back again. He had recognized the voice; it belonged to his Cuban landlord. It was possible that the man had been suspicious of him from the start.

But why should he want to knock him out, gag him, hold him until dark?

What was this business about a ride? Where? Why?

Leaden-footed, the hours ticked away. The church clock chimed six times, then seven, then eight. Kirk's hands and feet were numb; his throat was tight and dry. No one, he knew, would miss him, or come looking for him. He had covered his tracks too well. Nobody knew where he was, nobody except Jerry Gillem, enjoying himself in Miami.

Tay, he thought, oh Tay, if I ever get out of this . . .

The door opened; footsteps came over to him, stopped. Something cold touched his cheek, and Kirk flinched. " That, amigo," his captor said, " is a knife. I assure you I know how to use it. But there will be no trouble if you do exactly as I say. First, I cut the ropes round your ankles, so . . . Next, I take the tape off

your eyes so you can see where you are walking. Like this . . ."

The tape came off in a single, brutal jerk. For a moment, Kirk's dazzled eyes could see nothing. Then it all came into focus: the brown, feral face close to his own, the suitcase standing by the open door, the light glinting on the blade of the knife.

The Cuban said mockingly, " Very clever of you to use a camera in your work. But not so clever to take a room in my boarding-house. I do not love my neighbour as myself, oh no. But I love the money he is willing to pay to keep out of gaol."

Kirk jerked his head, making a muffled, strangled sound. If his captor would only remove the gag, would let him explain . . . Abruptly the point of the spring blade was pressed against his neck. " On your feet! And no tricks. I said I would deliver you, dead or alive. Believe me, the choice is yours."

Down the empty hall they went, out through a side entrance into a narrow lane where a car was parked. The Cuban opened the right-hand door. " Get in."

For a moment Kirk hesitated. If he made a break now, if he tried to run . . . The knife pricked him again.

It was no use. His hands were bound, and the Cuban could kill him before he had covered ten yards.

Through the warm, humid darkness they drove, keeping to the backstreets, until ahead of them Kirk saw the oily glitter of the bay. For ten minutes they followed the shore line, until finally the Cuban stopped the car in the looming shadows of an enormous storage tank. He reached across Kirk, unlocked the door. " Get out, amigo."

He shepherded his captive across some railway tracks and onto a low wharf where half a dozen shrimp boats were moored. At the far end was a long, low craft, painted black. Lights glowed in the squat cabin, and as they approached, Kirk heard the throbbing of a powerful engine, idling.

A shadow jumped from the boat to the dock and stood there, gigantic in the starlight. Behind him, Kirk heard a click as the knife was snapped shut. The Cuban said, " Here's your passenger, Captain. And his luggage. It can go overboard with him."

" Damn you, Lopez! " Grimes's voice was hoarse with fury. " You've just about made me miss the tide! "

He gripped Kirk by the shoulders, thrust him aboard the boat so violently that he stumbled over a coil of rope and sprawled face down on the deck. Grimes followed him, picked up the rope's end, ran it between Kirk's elbows, and made it fast to a stanchion. He swung himself back onto the dock.

" Where's that camera? "

The Cuban knelt down, opened Kirk's suitcase, took out the

camera. He stood up, balancing it in his hand. "The money first, if you please, Captain."

"You'll get the money when I get back."

"Ah no, Captain," Lopez retreated a step. "We agreed on the price. I have run great risks to . . ."

He did not finish the sentence. Grimes's big hand shot out, gripped him by the shirtfront, lifted him completely off his feet. The smaller man was shaken like a rag doll until the camera clattered on the planking of the dock. With his free hand, Grimes picked it up, hurled it far into the bay. He slapped Lopez twice across the face, the sound of the blows loud and vicious in the quiet night.

"That'll teach you not to blackguard me, you stinking little thug. Now get off this dock before I really get angry and break your dirty neck! If you ever show up here again, I'll kill you!"

He flung the Cuban away from him. Lopez staggered back; his heels hit the dock fenders. For a moment he hung there, arms flailing wildly. Then, with a hollow splash, he toppled into the black water.

Grimes threw back his head and bellowed with laughter. "You wanted to keep the camera, did you? Well, swim around and find it, damn you!" He jumped back into the boat, cast off the stern line. Still roaring with laughter, he untied Kirk from the stanchion, jerked him to his feet, thrust him into the cabin.

"You can stay in there and say your prayers!" The cabin door slammed, the outside bolt was driven home. Footsteps thudded on the cabin roof as Grimes ran forward to cast off the bow line.

Kirk hurled himself once against the unyielding door, then whirled around. With the toe of his shoe he raised the engine hatch, kicked it aside. For half a second he hesitated, staring at the pulsing mechanism. Then he drove his heel down, hard, at the point where the copper fuel line entered the carburettor. Three times he kicked, with all his strength; then, jamming his toe under the bent tubing, he ripped it loose altogether.

The engine coughed. Driven by the electric fuel pump, petrol jetted from the broken pipe.

Kirk crouched, turning his face away. If he was going to die anyway, the exact method made little difference, and there was a chance, a faint chance . . .

The pulsing of the engine ceased. Kirk heard Grimes swear, heard the heavy footsteps on the roof. Then what he hoped for happened. The petrol came into contact with hot metal. A tongue of flame leapt from the engine to the roof of the cabin, setting it fiercely ablaze.

He heard Grimes's startled yell. The bolt was shot back, the cabin door flew open. As it did, Kirk hurled himself forward, head down. His shoulder struck Grimes like a battering-ram, sending both of them sprawling.

Grimes was on his feet first. Ignoring Kirk, he snatched a fire-extinguisher from its rack by the wheel. He moved straight towards the wall of yellow flame.

Kirk groaned and came up on his knees. In a matter of seconds, he knew, the main fuel tank would explode. He hurled himself headlong onto the dock and rolled over. As he staggered to his feet, he realized the cord binding his wrists had broken. Automatically, he jerked the tape free from his mouth. Then he began to run.

Behind him, dimly, he heard Grimes's bull voice roaring; then night turned into day. He felt a searing heat; a thunderclap of sound seemed to pick him up bodily, fling him violently forward. Then everything merged into total darkness . . .

When Kirk opened his eyes, he was lying in bed in a small, antiseptic-looking hospital room.

Early sunlight slanted through a window, and he saw a large, relaxed-looking man sitting by the bed, watching him. " Hullo," the man said. " Feeling better? "

Kirk pondered the question, then nodded slowly, deciding it was better to feel rotten than not to feel at all.

" I'm Dr. Fergusen," the man said. " We kept you under drugs all night, so you may feel drowsy for a while. You're a bit singed, but you're far from dead."

Kirk made a great effort and uttered one word. " Tay? "

" Your wife? " Dr. Fergusen nodded. " We got in touch with her as soon as the ambulance brought you in. Your little playmates never got around to removing your wallet, so identification was easy." He stood up, took a glass of water from the bedside table. " Drink? "

Kirk swallowed gratefully. " Thanks."

" The little fellow will pull through, all right. They found him, half stunned, in the water. The big one was dead on arrival. The police are pleased with you, by the way."

" With me? "

" The Department of Justice has been after them to stop up that loophole for a long time. Their racket—Grimes's and Gardella's —was smuggling in aliens. They thought you were an immigration officer collecting evidence with that camera, recording the faces of illegal entrants. The police picked up Gardella last night, after they pried the story out of Lopez."

Dr. Fergusen moved to the foot of the bed. He worked a

handle so that Kirk's head and shoulders rose a few inches. " You're a lucky fellow, Halliday. Very. They tell me Grimes was also wanted for a postal robbery, so you're eligible for the reward. But the real reason I think you're lucky is outside in the corridor."

He moved over to the door, opened it. " You can come in now, Mrs. Halliday."

He stood aside, and Tay brushed past him. Dark-haired Tay, lovely Tay.

" Oh Kirk," she said. " Oh darling . . ."

For a moment Dr. Fergusen stood there, watching them. Then, smiling a little, he went out quietly and closed the door.

★ ★ ★

OPS-A-DAISY—

I remember a young woman who persuaded her uncle, an Air Vice-Marshal, to go to see ballet for the first time in his life. He went reluctantly . . . and enjoyed it very much. The niece took him behind afterwards. " All very wholesome," he said to the boys and girls as if he were approving some meal in an R.A.F. mess.

" Thank you very much," they said. " Now you must meet Teddy here, who did the choreography."

" The *what*? "

They tried to explain the word to him and he thought it was all damn' clever. " Can't understand how you avoid bumping into each other with all that pirouetting and prancing."

" You organised many raids during the war, sir? And the aircraft seldom bumped into each other? "

" Ah, but that was all worked out beforehand," he said.

GILBERT HARDING, *Book of Manners*

—AIR LIFT

Lift her up tenderly,
Raise her with care,
Catch hold of one leg
And a handful of hair;
Swing her round savagely,
And when this palls,
Heave-Ho! Away with her
Into the stalls.

J. B. MORTON, *Song of the Ballet*

HIGH SPOTS

If thy heart fails thee, climb not at all

QUEEN ELIZABETH I

I am frightened by ladders, Freud, by ladders,
Ladders that rock and shudder and sink in the ground
As I rise to dangerous roofs and windows and branches,
My soul, Freud, my soul sinks in the ground.

What does this tell of my love, Freud, my love?
Is every swaying balcony or boudoir
Out of reach of my love because of my nerve's
Faltering, Freud, after three rungs, Freud, or four?

Help me, Freud, oh help me master the gap
Between the ground and all such high and precarious places.
Hold the ladder firm, and when I fly up,
Tell me, Freud, of successful similar cases.

Without you, Freud, my love will tumble, and then
Never, Freud, will I fly up ladders again.

REED WHITTEMORE, ***Ladders***

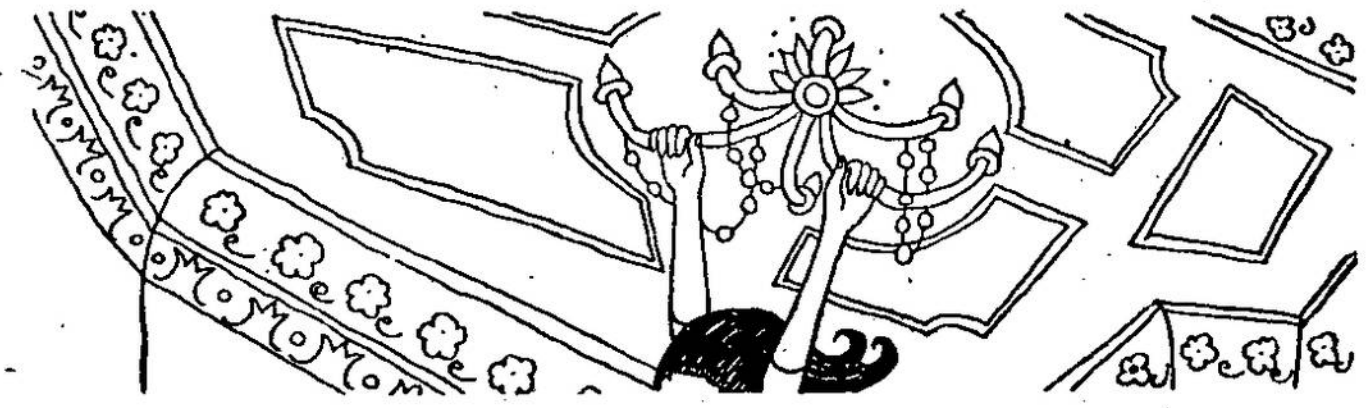
Swing High

Annette looked up at the chandelier and her heart beat violently . . .

In her imagination Annette had always reached her objective by a flying leap from the High Table; but she could see now that this was not a very practical idea. Grimly she began to pull one of the tables into the centre of the room. On top of the table she placed one of the chairs. Then she began to climb up. By the time she was on the table she was already beginning to feel rather far away from the ground. Annette was afraid of heights. However she mounted resolutely on to the chair. Here, by

standing on tiptoe, she could get her hands over the metal bar. She paused breathlessly. Then with a quick movement she kicked the chair away and hung stiffly in mid-air. The chandelier felt firm, her grip was strong, there was no terrible rending sound as the chain parted company with the ceiling. After all, thought Annette, I don't weigh much.

She kept her feet neatly together and her toes pointed. Then with an oscillation from the hips she began to swing very gently



to and fro. The chandelier began to ring, not with a deafening peal but with a very high and sweet tinkling sound; the sort of sound, after all, which you would expect a wave of the sea to make if it had been immobilized and turned into glass; a tiny internal rippling, a mixture of sound and light. Annette was completely enchanted by this noise and by the quiet rhythm of her own movements.

IRIS MURDOCH, *The Flight from the Enchanter*

A woman with a long tongue
Is a flight of steps leading to calamity.
from The Shi King, or Book of Odes, c.500 B.C.

Upper School

The lane was always the place to tell your secrets, if you did not have any you invented them: occasionally now I dream that I am turning out of school into the lane of confidences when I say to the boys of my class, " At last, I have a real secret."

" What is it? What is it? "

" I can fly."

And when they do not believe me, I flap my arms and slowly leave the ground, only a few inches at first, then gaining air until I fly waving my cap level with the upper windows of the school, peering in until the mistress of the piano screams and the metronome falls to the ground and stops, and there is no more time.

DYLAN THOMAS, *Quite Early One Morning*

Top Dressing

His whole appearance changed, however, when he began to describe the tight-rope walker.

His eyes glistened as he told me all about the Memsahib who had walked along a rope. " Right up in the air. Like this." At this point he gave a most realistic imitation of tight-rope walking up and down the verandah, holding a mop over his head, and wobbling most alarmingly at times . . . Then came a surprising question. " How much money does the Memsahib earn for doing this? "

Before I could think of anything to say, there came another question. " Would she earn 100s. a month? " I felt safe in answering, " Yes."

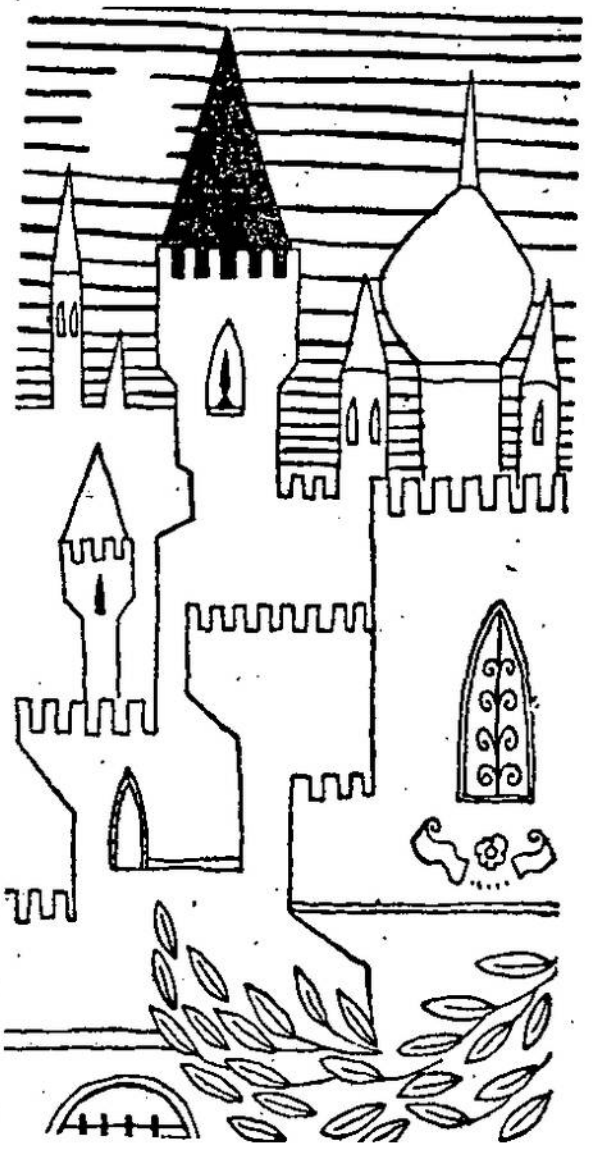
" Would she earn 200s. a month? " Ten pounds a month did not seem excessive, so again I said, " Yes."

The next question really staggered me.

" Well, could the Memsahib not afford to buy any more clothes? "

Africans at a Circus,
from The Times

Ramparts and Towers



Castles with lofty
Ramparts and towers,—
Maidens disdainful
In Beauty's array—
All shall be ours!

Bold is the venture,
Splendid the pay!
Lads, let the trumpets
For us be suing,
Calling to pleasure,
Calling to ruin!

Stormy our life is;
Such is its boon:
Maidens and castles
Capitulate soon.

Bold is the venture,
Splendid the pay!
And the soldiers go marching
Marching away.

GOETHE, *Faust*

THE WOMAN AT FOG POINT

" You still want to find her ? "
the newspaperman asked

BY HUGH B. CAVE

CALLAHAN walked into the reporters' room at nine-thirty on Monday morning and someone said, " Hullo, Sam. Mac wants you."

So, instead of hanging up his battered hat and seedy trench coat, Callahan went into John Mackey's office and stood before Mackey's big bare desk, scowling.

He was older than Mackey. He was the oldest man on the *Chronicle* staff, and a widower whose only son had been killed in Korea, and he thought the world a miserable place to live in. Had there been anywhere else to live, Callahan would have chucked up his job and gone there without a regret.

" Kozlowsky called up," Mackey said.

" Kozlowsky ? "

Mackey pushed a copy of the previous day's paper across the desk, and on the cover was a photograph of a self-satisfied young man with a fish. The caption explained that the fish was a prize-winning striper and the young man was Andy Kozlowsky, a local angler. Callahan had written the story, but Callahan never remembered a story two days after he wrote it, because he considered his potboilers not worth remembering. Once, long ago, he had thought himself a writer. He knew now he never would be.

" He phoned to thank you for a grand story," Mackey said. " Also to ask if we had heard about some guy who is digging down on Fog Point."

" Digging for what ? "

" Nobody knows. He has been digging there for weeks, Kozlowsky says. Kozlowsky has seen him several times while down there fishing. His name is Sayer and the Fog Pointers think he's batty."

" I hate stories that begin that way," Callahan grunted.

" The best stories begin that way."

"It's forty-odd miles to Fog Point."

"Take all the time you want, Sam."

The drive to Fog Point was no pleasure on a New England November morning, with the cottages shuttered tight and the sea running dark on deserted beaches. Shore roads were for summer-time, Callahan reflected gloomily. Fog Point itself was half a mile of bleak, wind-swept beach reaching forlornly into the Atlantic, with nothing on it but a few clam-diggers' shacks with ramshackle roofs. Strictly for the gulls.

Callahan stopped at the end of the village street and trudged into a store. It was probably a busy enough store from June to September, with the summer crowd trotting in and out. Now it had the dreary air of a waiting-room after the last bus has left. The proprietor, a shrivelled man of sixty wearing a heavy blue sweater and a cap with turned-up ear-muffs, sold Callahan cigarettes without comment. Callahan lit one and put his hands back in his trench-coat pockets.

He was a newspaperman, he said. "Ever hear of a fellow named Sayer, been digging for something out on the Point?"

"Sure."

"What's he digging for?"

"He don't say."

"What is he? A tramp? beachcomber?"

The storekeeper leaned on the counter and said he didn't think so. A crank, maybe, but not a tramp. He wore good clothes and talked like an educated man. "Start of the season, he rented Pete Worrell's old shack. Been livin' in it ever since. Comes up here to the village every so often for groceries."

"He lives there alone?" Callahan asked. "No visitors?"

"There was a girl came to see him for a while. She stopped five, six weeks ago."

"Where did this Sayer come from?"

"He never said."

Callahan left his car in a sad little grove of cedars a hundred feet beyond the store and walked out onto the Point, not hoping for much. Nine times out of ten, stories of this kind didn't lead to anything. When they did, they involved more work than they were worth. Pete Worrell's shack—the one Sayer had rented—was way out at the tip of the Point, and with the wind coming in raw off the ocean and whipping sand in his face, it was a long trek.

There was no one around. Callahan knocked and the door was opened by a young man wearing a clean white shirt and brown corduroy trousers. "Mr. Sayer?" Callahan said. "I'm Sam Callahan of the *Chronicle*."

"A reporter?"

"I do feature stories."

Sayer was slender, with a worried face and good brown eyes. He stared for a moment in silence. "I don't think I want—" he began; then stopped and let it hang for a few seconds, frowning. He seemed to be frowning inwardly at his own thoughts, not at Callahan. "All right," he said abruptly. "Come in."

Callahan was glad to get out of the wind and surprised at what he saw. The shack was only a board box, but it was comfortably furnished—decent chairs, a substantial oak table, some good-looking water-colours on the walls, a kitchen range, with a welcome fire in it. The adjoining bedroom was attractive, too, what he could see of it.

"Sit down, won't you?" Sayer said.

They both sat. Sayer looked at Callahan with an uneasy smile and said, "Well?"

"I guess you know why I'm here," Callahan said. "About this digging you're doing."

"What about it?"

"People are talking."

Sayer's smile faded. "So you came all the way down here to ask what I'm digging for?"

"My job. Snooping in other folks' business is my job. Believe me, if I could earn a living any other way, I would."

Sayer got up for cigarettes—they were in the bedroom—and offered Callahan one. He walked up and down the room. Callahan knew the signs. Sayer didn't want to brush him off, but, on the other hand, he didn't want to say too much. Waiting, Callahan tried to size him up.

He didn't slide easily into any of the usual classifications. About thirty, Callahan guessed; maybe a year or two younger. In looks, a little like Callahan's own boy, Mike—anyway, Mike had had the same intent way of looking at you, as if troubled with questions and wondering if you knew any of the answers. Only one thing really stood out: he looked tired and discouraged, and he was nervous.

Sayer stopped pacing. "There is a story," he said. "I'm digging for treasure."

Callahan got out pad and pencil. "What kind of treasure, Mr. Sayer?"

"Well, I'm not sure. I mean, I'm not sure I can explain it." He looked at Callahan the way Mike had used to look, and Callahan could see he was thinking. The words wouldn't come because the thoughts got in their way.

"I came here in June," he said. "Not to dig for treasure, you

understand. Just to—well, if you must know, I came to paint. I discovered the treasure—" he turned to look at a calendar on the wall—" on July the eleventh. The night of July the eleventh, 1952. Be sure to get that right."

"The night of July the eleventh," Callahan said. " What was it you discovered? "

" Wait. I discovered it then, but didn't know the value of what I'd found. You understand? I didn't realize its worth until I'd lost it."

" When did you lose it? "

" September the seventh. A Sunday. I last saw it on September the seventh." Sayer frowned again, plucking nervously at his shirt. " Have you got those dates right? " he asked, his gaze on Callahan's pencil.

" July eleven, September seven," Callahan said. Maybe the guy was a crank after all, but he didn't think so. He thought Sayer was trying to tell him something without getting in too deep. It was a game politicians played all the time, wanting to get their names in the paper, but afraid to commit themselves. " What was this treasure? " he asked.

" I can't tell you exactly."

Callahan looked up from his pad, sighed, and put away his pencil. " If I'm going to do a story, Mr. Sayer—"

" Wait," Sayer said quickly. " Call it a priceless object. I don't know its name. That's the honest truth; I don't know. It's gold. It's a kind of bracelet, only it's more than a bracelet —at least to me—and it's priceless. I've got to find it or—" He bit his lip and Callahan saw his hands clench. Then, " Come on, I'll show you," Sayer said.

Callahan followed Sayer to the water's edge and halted beside a shovel sticking upright in the sand. There were holes everywhere. The Point resembled a battlefield.

" You see? " Sayer said. " I'm telling you the truth."

" But not the whole truth," Callahan said. " You want me to write a story, but it has to be your kind of story."

They stood looking at each other for a moment; then Sayer made a helpless gesture with his hands as if to say, *Well, I tried.* " I'm sorry," he said.

" I can write a story," Callahan told him. " I can put in it the facts you gave me, so the person reading it will get whatever you're trying to say. I can do that for you, but you'll have to tell me what you're digging for. And why."

Sayer shook his head.

Callahan couldn't be angry with him; he looked so discouraged.

" Well," he said, " so long for now, anyway. I may come back." He turned away, then stopped. " By the way, your name is—? "

" Sayer's my real name. Harry Sayer."

" Where from, Mr. Sayer? "

" I teach at the art school."

Callahan trudged back to his car, shaking his head. Failing to get a story didn't trouble him; you took the bad with the good and it evened up. But it was hard to come up against a decent-seeming man who so obviously needed help and not be able to do anything for him.

Maybe he was sensitive on the subject—Mike had needed help too, Mike and that girl. He hadn't done anything for them either.

At the car, he pulled up short. The door was open and a man sat on the front seat, waiting for him. " I'm Pete Worrell," the man announced. " Heard you was askin' about the feller rented my house."

Callahan said, " Yes," and looked at him with interest. He was one of the real old-timers: grey hair and beard, a worn leather jacket with the elbows out, patched rubber boots on his knobbly legs. Callahan got in beside him and offered a cigarette.

When it was lit, Pete Worrell said, " I could tell you somethin'."

Callahan looked in his wallet. It contained a five-dollar bill and two singles. " I'm only a newspaperman," he growled. " I work for a living."

" Will my name be in the papers? "

" It could be."

Worrell pushed the five away and turned on the seat to scrutinize Callahan's face. His eyes had looked at the sun a lot; they were almost colourless. " My outboard died on me one night over by Milestone Beach," he said, " and I had to row home. Got started late. About eleven o'clock I come by the Point here, headin' up into the cove, and I seen somethin'."

" You saw something? "

" A woman. I seen a woman walkin' along the beach out there at the end of the Point, right about where Sayer is diggin'. He wasn't diggin' then. This was in July. She stopped and took off her shoes, and then she walked into the water. Had all her clothes on, but walked into the water. This was eleven o'clock at night, mind you."

" People do strange things."

" She walked in fast, like she meant business. I was just about to let out a yell when Sayer come out of the house and beat me to it. He ran into the water and grabbed her. She began to cry, and he made her come out of the water, and they

walked up to the house together. I didn't see her come out of the house again."

"When was this?"

"I told you. July."

"I mean when in July. What date?"

"I don't recall the date. Around the middle of July, the second or third Friday."

The fourth of July had been a Friday, Callahan remembered. So July the eleventh was a Friday. Sayer found his treasure July eleventh. "Was this the same woman who came to see Sayer later?"

"Same one. Came most every Sunday until September. Brought a little girl with her sometimes."

"How did she get here?"

"Bus. Once she drove a car, though. I seen it."

"I don't suppose you noticed the number."

Worrell shook his head.

"Let's ask at the store," Callahan said.

He drove up to the store and went inside. The same wrinkled man was behind the counter, talking now to a couple of Fog Pointers.

"Like to ask a few questions," Callahan said, "if you gents don't mind."

They said they didn't mind.

It seemed that in the summer there was a station-wagon bus that shuttled up and down the shore road, making four or five trips a day between Ashquet and Fog Point, and on Sundays the girl was usually on it. She would arrive about eleven in the morning and walk out to the house on the Point, and about nine-thirty at night she would reappear in time to catch the last bus back to town. She was a good-looking auburn-haired girl. She never talked to anyone.

Towards the end she began bringing this child with her, an attractive little girl, just old enough to toddle. The men at the store remembered hearing her call the child Margie.

"That Sayer feller must have got his diggin' habit from Margie," one of the men said with a slack-lipped grin. "She dug all over the place with a toy pail and shovel while Sayer and the girl sat and talked. They used to have picnics on the beach and the kid would go wanderin' off. Once she walked all the way back here to the village and the woman had to come after her."

"The woman came in a car once," Callahan said. "Any of you notice the number?"

"Just that it was a Connecticut number."

" Who drives the bus? "

The bus didn't run this time of year, they said, only in summer. A man named Lajoie owned it and drove it. He lived over in Tunbury, and in winter he was a sign-painter.

Tunbury was not much out of Callahan's way back to the city, so he stopped and inquired where Lajoie lived. The bus was in the yard. Lajoie, a man of about forty, came to the door in overalls, wiping his hands on a rag that smelt of turpentine.

He remembered the woman. " Every Sunday," he said, nodding briskly. " She got on the bus every Sunday morning at Ashquet. She was a real nice girl, always spoke to me. One Sunday she was late, I waited for her, but she didn't show up. She passed me later on the road, driving her car, and she waved."

" Driving her car? " Callahan said.

" Yes. She always left it in Ashquet. Said she didn't like driving on the shore road. Too much traffic."

" You ever notice the number of her car? " Callahan asked.

Lajoie shook his head, chewing his lower lip. It was a Connecticut car, but he didn't recall the number. " Wait a minute," he said. " Hold on a second." Leaving Callahan sitting in the living-room, he went to the foot of the stairs and called up, " Larry! hey, Larry! "

Someone upstairs said, " What is it, Pa? "

" Bring down those pictures you took for Mr. Laycock that Sunday," Lajoie said. " Those pictures of his store." Coming back into the living-room, he nodded briskly and said, " Larry is a camera-fan, taking pictures all the time. Pretty good too. Sells some. Lucky for you he had a cold and stayed away from school today."

A lanky teenage boy came down from upstairs with some eight-by-ten prints in his hand, and Lajoie took them and shuffled through them. " There you are," he said, handing Callahan one. " That's her car. She always parked it in front of Laycock's store."

So Callahan had the number of the girl's car, and back at his desk in the reporters' room all he had to do was make a routine phone call. The car was registered in the name of Mrs. Roger Purnell. The address was just over the county border in one of those small towns near the shore.

Callahan smoked cigarettes and thought about it, and what he thought was not good. A married woman, he told himself. To hell with it—he was pretty sure there was no story. But several things about it nagged him throughout the rest of the day and were still troubling him when he went home.

While cooking supper that evening—he always cooked supper;

the rest of his meals he ate out—he thought of the look of misery on Harry Sayer's face. Callahan knew a lonely, discouraged look when he saw one. For a long time now he'd been seeing one in his mirror every morning when he shaved. Maybe he was crazy. Maybe it was just another sordid story and there wasn't a thing he could do. But it wouldn't hurt to find out, would it?

Next morning he drove to the little town across the border. He knew a man who ran a printing business there. It wouldn't be hard to get a line on Mrs. Roger Purnell.

He drove to the house first. It was an old one, set behind a row of elms on a quiet street behind the Town Hall—a big grey, wooden house, respectable as a church, with a small sign on the gate. The sign read: ROGER PURNELL, M.D. Callahan parked across the street and sat behind the wheel.

A car with a doctor's emblem on it stood at the kerb in front of the house, but the registration number was not the one that he had seen in the photograph.

He didn't know what to do except wait. There were reporters on the *Chronicle* who played detective at every opportunity, getting a kick out of it, but Callahan was not that sort. He told himself the Fog Point girl was undoubtedly Doctor Purnell's wife, but he wouldn't believe it until there was nothing else to believe. He sat and smoked cigarettes, feeling tired and out of sorts.

After half an hour a car pulled up behind the doctor's car, and it was the one he sought—the one in the picture. A woman and a little girl got out of it. The little girl had auburn hair, but the woman didn't; she was plump and dark. They went up the path together and into the house.

Callahan shook his head and drove back to Main Street, stopping in front of an old brick building. He climbed two flights of stairs and opened a door marked E. W. HARRIS, JOB PRINTING. With his hand out-thrust, he said, "How are you, Ed?"

Ed Harris wore glasses and his grey hair was just a wisp on the back of his head. He shook Callahan's hand warmly. A long time ago he and Callahan had worked together on a Boston paper.

"What brings you round here?" he asked. "Story?"

Callahan was in no hurry. He sat on a stool and talked about old times while his gaze roamed the shop. Many a time he had toyed with the notion of opening just such a shop himself, but it took courage to break out of the old familiar rut and he had never been too strong on courage. Now, with Ruth and Mike gone, it didn't seem to matter much.

He said at last, "What do you know about Dr. Roger Purnell, Ed?"

"Nice fellow," Ed said. "Very good doctor. I go to him myself."

"You know his wife?"

"Fine woman."

"What does she look like?"

The woman Ed described was not the woman of Fog Point. She was the one who had stepped out of the car with the little girl, half an hour before. So Callahan described the Fog Point woman as best he could, and said, "Who might she be, Ed?"

"Mrs. Purnell's younger sister."

"Tell me about her."

"I'm not sure I want to see that story kicked around," Ed said. "She's had a rough time."

"You know me better than that."

"Yes," Ed said grudgingly, "I guess I do. Well, she came here from your town some time ago, Sam. She came to live with her sister, doc's wife. She was going to have a baby and she wasn't married."

Callahan looked at his knuckles and nodded.

"She'd wanted to marry the boy, but he was being called up and posted to Korea, and her people said she had to wait till he got home," Ed said. "They were really crazy about each other. So when the boy had gone off to Korea and the girl found out the baby was coming, she came here to have it, because she was afraid of her parents."

"Who was the boy?"

"Doc never told me his name."

Callahan heaved a long sigh. It was the old story, he told himself; the old, old story. You kept hearing it, and no matter how many times you heard it, it did something to you. "I can finish it," he said. "She had her baby and waited for the boy to come back and marry her, but he didn't come. He forgot about her and married some other girl. Or got killed."

"He got killed," Ed said.

Callahan frowned at this man who had once been a close friend. "You remember my boy Mike?"

Ed nodded.

"He was going with a girl," Callahan said, "and they wanted to get married before he left for Korea. Same story. Her people wouldn't hear of it. Mike asked me to go talk to them, but what could I say? She was their daughter, not mine. Maybe they were right. Anyway, I hardly knew them. Ruth would have known what to do, I guess, but I didn't. I just did nothing."

He sighed again. Even now, so long after, he could still remember the intensity of Mike's pleading. Maybe he'd never been close enough to Mike, never known all that was going on, but that was one time the boy had counted on him and he'd let him down.

"When did this girl get the news?" Callahan asked.

Ed looked thoughtful for a minute. "July, I think it was. Right around Independence Day."

"July. That's when I got mine. She a nice girl, Ed?"

"They don't come any finer," Ed said with feeling. "They don't come one bit finer, Sam."

"What's her name?"

"Susan Copeland."

Callahan got off his stool and repeated the name slowly, staring at Ed's face. "Susan Copeland." He shook himself a little. "Well, thanks," he said. "Thanks, Ed." He shook Ed's hand and went downstairs, pausing on the sidewalk to put a cigarette between his lips. He didn't light the cigarette. Finding it in his mouth after he got into his car, he took it out and looked at it absently and put it into his pocket.

He had it pretty straight now, he told himself. The girl had gone to pieces when she heard the baby's father was killed. On July eleventh she'd borrowed her sister's car and driven to Fog Point. Maybe the place had some sentimental attachment. Maybe she and the boy used to go there together. So on the eleventh of July she'd gone there to kill herself, and Harry Sayer had stopped her. They had become friends. Every Sunday after, the girl had gone to Fog Point, and towards the end she'd taken her daughter along.

But why, in September, had she suddenly stopped going there?

Callahan went to the office and began a story from some old notes in his desk, about a man who built model ships out of matches. It passed the afternoon.

He ate supper and drove to Fog Point. When he stepped into the store for cigarettes before walking out to the shack, Pete Worrell sidled up to him. "Somethin' I forgot to tell you," Pete said. "I seen Sayer and that girl neckin' one time."

"Necking?"

"Well, he had his arms around her and was kissin' her. They was sayin' good night, I guess. Come to think of it, that must've been the last time he ever did say good night to her—the last time she was here." Pete pulled at his ear. "Maybe that's why she never come back, hey?"

Maybe it is, Callahan thought. On the way out to the shack

he pondered over it and it made sense. It made a lot of sense. No one answered his knock on the door, but when he stepped back, frowning, he heard a sound of digging.

He found the man hard at work behind a new mound of sand. Sayer didn't hear Callahan come up. He had a wire screen nailed to a wooden frame and was throwing each shovelful of sand against it, pausing only to watch the sand slide down the wire.

Callahan watched him for a moment and then said quietly, "Hullo, Mr. Sayer."

Sayer wheeled about. "Oh, it's you," he said.

"Why don't you tell me what you're digging for?" Callahan asked. "It's something the girl lost, isn't it?"

"What girl?"

"The one you pulled out of the sea here, the night of July the eleventh."

Sayer pushed his shovel slowly into the mound of sand. "What do you know about her?"

"More than you do, if I've got you sized up right. You don't even know who she is."

Sayer hesitated. "No," he admitted. "I guess I don't."

"What name did she give you?"

"Mary. Mary Nelson." He moved his head slowly from side to side and his voice was that of a man who knew he was beaten, but just couldn't make himself give up. "She said she lived in Providence. I know better now. I turned the city inside out."

"You know why she lied to you?"

"No. I wish to God I did."

"Let's go back in the house," Callahan said. "It's cold out here."

They went into the house and sat down, and Callahan, after a moment's silence, said, "You know, I believe I've worked it all out. I think I even know what you're digging for." He held up his hand to halt an interruption. "Just tell me one thing. Was the little girl hers?"

"No. Her sister's."

"That's it," Callahan said. "That does it." He sighed deeply, shaking his head. "The trouble is, she was afraid to—Well, never mind. I can help you, Sayer. First, though, we have to have a little talk."

"Talk about what?" Sayer said defensively.

"You. All I know about you is what I see, and what I see isn't too good. You said you taught at the art school. You mean the Parker Art Institute in the city?"

"Yes."

"What do you teach?"

"Textile design. Some commercial art."

"Where did you study for that kind of job?"

"In Boston."

"You don't come from New England," Callahan said. "That's no New England accent."

"I come from Ohio."

"So you come from Ohio, you studied in Boston, you teach at the Parker Institute," Callahan said. "How come you're living in a shack on Fog Point?"

Sayer was running short of patience. "Look," he said, "do I have to—"

"If you want any help from me, yes. This girl has had a rough time, Sayer. I'm not letting her in for another one."

"All right. I came here this summer to paint. I told you that. Those are some of my paintings." Sayer waved a hand vaguely at the water-colours on the walls. "Then, when it was time for school to open, I couldn't go back. I just couldn't do it—not while there was a chance of finding Mary. I asked for an extension of time to go on with my painting, and the school granted me a three months' leave of absence." He raised his head and the good brown eyes focused defiantly on Callahan's face. "Look, Mr. Callahan, I don't know what you're after. If you think I'm trying to hide anything—"

"No," Callahan said. "I just wanted to be sure."

"I've told you everything."

Callahan got up. He walked around the room, looking at the water-colours, and came back and stood before Sayer's chair with his hands in his coat pockets. "You told Mary you were in love with her, didn't you, that last night? The last time you saw her?"

"I asked her to marry me."

"So she never came back. She was afraid to come back, Sayer. She'd lied to you about the little girl. Margie is her little girl, not her sister's. I'll tell you how it happened."

Callahan sat down on the arm of a chair and told Sayer the facts. While reciting them, he watched the man's face, but there was no change. The misery remained in it.

"You still want to find her?" Callahan said then.

"Both of them. I want both of them," Sayer said.

"What are you digging for? Something she lost? Something with her name on it—her real name—that you could trace her by?"

"A bracelet," Sayer said. "The little girl lost a bracelet when she was playing in the sand one day. It had her name on it, she

said. I don't even know if it had her full name on it. Maybe it just said Margie. It was my only hope."

"You can stop digging," Callahan said. He told Sayer who the woman was and where she lived. "Good luck," he said, holding out his hand. "Let me know what happens."

Harry Sayer shook his hand in silence, too moved to speak. He stood there trembling, and when he could at last find words, he said, "I'll see that you get your story, Mr. Callahan."

Callahan shook his head. "There isn't any story, boy. Maybe there was before, when you were hoping I'd write something that would let her know how you felt if she happened to read it. Maybe then. Man digs for treasure he found July eleventh and lost September seventh—be sure you get those dates right. Won't tell what it is, but has to find it if it takes the rest of his life. That was a story. There's no story now."

"Thanks, Mr. Callahan."

"Let me know, though. I never worked so hard before on a story I couldn't use. At least I ought to know the ending."

"I'll phone you."

He didn't phone. A couple of evenings later Callahan's doorbell rang, while he was sitting in his shirtsleeves, thinking about getting supper. He had a hunch who it might be, and after pressing the button that opened the downstairs door of the apartment house, he put on a coat and tie while his callers were climbing the stairs. It took them a while because Margie was with them.

Callahan shook hands. Holding the girl's hand in his own a long time, he looked at her and said quietly, "Sue Copeland, how are you?" Then, pushing the door shut, he got down on his heels and held out his arms. "Margie," he said.

She let him take hold of her, and after a minute she got over being shy and began exploring his pockets.

"She looks like you, Mr. Callahan," Susan said.

"A bit," Callahan said solemnly, and looked up at Harry Sayer. "That all right with you, Harry?"

"She couldn't have a better grandfather," Harry said. "You could have told me, though."

"Sue had to tell you." Callahan sat down and took the little girl in his lap, and when she showed an interest in his tie-pin, he took it off and let her have it. He didn't think she looked much like him. She looked like Mike, and a little like Mike's mother.

If I'd done what Mike wanted me to, he thought, Susan and Mike would have been married and . . .

But he could see it didn't matter to Harry Sayer, and that was all that counted.

Harry, handing him a small package, said, "This is for you, Mr. Callahan," and Callahan opened it while Susan and Harry watched him. It contained a wristwatch engraved with the words: *To Sam, with all our love. Sue and Harry Sayer.*

They were to be married the following week. Would Callahan come to the wedding?

"You couldn't keep me away," Callahan said.

When they had gone, he cooked his supper and ate it, with a copy of the paper propped against the sugar bowl. His story about Kozlowsky and the prize catch—he hadn't read it before. It wasn't much. Just the usual Callahan prose, uninspired and pedestrian. He would never set the world on fire, and he knew it.

But he felt good. Admiring his watch while sipping his coffee, he felt alive again. He wouldn't be a nuisance to anyone—he could never be that—but it was nice to know he had a family once more. Once in a while maybe they'd have him over for Sunday dinner.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTION to HOW'S THAT? on page 11

1. *Milton, in Il Penseroso*
2. *Hockey, lacrosse*
3. *a. ostrich; b. swan; c. crocodile*
4. *a. Barbara Frietchie (poem by John Greenleaf Whittier)*
   b. Sir Richard Grenville (poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson)
5. *Wensleydale, Caerphilly, Double Gloucester, Leicester, Lancashire, Dorset, for example*
6. *Shuts the outer door of his rooms to exclude visitors*
7. *Sheikh Hassan ben Sabbah, founder of the Assassins, who made his stronghold in the mountain fastnesses of Lebanon in the 12th century*
8. *a. aquiline, high-bridged nose; b. straight nose, in line with forehead; c. rump of cooked fowl; d. drink of mixed beer and gin*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 4, *Eavesdrop.* 9, *Ice-cream.* 10, *Soft as air.* 11, *Listener.* 12, *Dormitory.* 13, *Orator.* 15, *Pups.* 16, *Shaver.* 19, *Divest.* 20, *Ahem.* 24, *Rise up.* 25, *Skull-caps.* 27, *All eaten.* 28, *Dignitary.* 29, *Epilogue.* 30, *Skedaddle.*

Down. 1, *Pillbox.* 2, *Hessian.* 3, *Treetop.* 4, *Eased.* 5, *Amorous.* 6, *Entombs her.* 7, *Dust-trap.* 8, *Osier-bed.* 14, *Rusticated.* 17, *Pickwick.* 18, *Declined.* 20, *Apparel.* 21, *Miserly.* 22, *Nest-egg.* 23, *Sponger.* 26, *Slype.*

A BOUT OF MOONSHINE

Sure his eager dancing eyes showed me
'twould be a devil of a battle

BY HARALD LÖVGREEN

"PUT your knife away now," said O'Shaughanessy, "for he wouldn't be liking it at all. If you were to cut only a small notch in the wood the good lord alone knows what might happen to you. Maybe a branch would break off and fall on you, and there'd be an end of you, or you'd be hurt bad. Put it away now, and I'll tell you all about it."

We were sitting on a small patch of lovely summer-green grass that reached almost down to the water's edge. In front of us the lake, a huge shining silver disk, that was the sunbeams' dance floor, stretched away to where its farthest shore was lost in haze, so that the glistening water seemed to run up into the sky itself. Nearer at hand, to right and left of us as we sat at the head of the lake, the mountains came in close, their flanks brown and green with heavy forest.

Right beside us an enormous oak towered up, an age-old thing that cast a welcome shade and provided a natural seat between several monstrous protruding roots. On that seat, big enough for two, O'Shaughanessy and I were sitting, lazing, half dozing, sometimes talking, and thoroughly enjoying ourselves. More from habit than anything else, I had pulled out my pocket-knife and was just about to start jabbing idly at the solid wood when my companion stopped me abruptly.

O'Shaughanessy was a big man, the biggest I have ever seen, and the strongest too. My father once said of him that he'd the face of a furnace and the soul of a poet and the thirst of a fool, but when you're twelve years old you don't think of things like that; you see only the friendliness and the comforting strength, and hope to grow up as strong yourself one day. So when he checked me and offered a story instead I obeyed willingly enough.

It was like this now: I was a young man then and in the pride of my strength. More than ten years ago it was, the very year

in which I won the wrestling and everybody was going about saying I was the greatest champion ever heard of in these parts. I'd been down to the house of Michael O'Hare that lies at the bottom of what was then called the Flower Valley, about a mile from here. We'd been celebratin', his wife having given him a third son, so the moon was well up the sky before I left.

It was a fine summer night and I thought it might be a good thing to take a walk before going back to the village. I set out for this lake intending to make for this very spot and sit here and have a last smoke. But when I got to the waterside I couldn't tell exactly where I was, though I knew the place as well as the palm of my hand. The big tree was gone, you see, and the grass as smooth and dark as a piece of velvet, no hole in it at all, and the water lapping at its edge as soft as a cat drinking milk.

It seemed a strange thing to me for a tree as big as this one to vanish away with no trace at all left behind it. For a moment I began to fear the drink was beginning to be too strong for me, but the tree was gone all right.

I looked about to see if by some mischance I had mistaken the spot, and then I saw I was not alone: there was someone standing in the shadow of the bushes yonder.

"Come out into the light," I says, "and let's have a look at you. Maybe you can tell me what happened to the old oak that was here only yesterday, for I passed it by and saw it with my own two eyes."

At that, out he comes into the moonglow, and stands away from me some six feet, no more, letting me have a good look at him. He was the queerest figure that ever I saw, a giant of a man, taller than myself though not so broad, with long brown hair falling down to his shoulders and a gold band round his head to keep it off his face. He wore a long white robe and a cloak of some material that glittered all over like frost in the moonlight; his legs and arms were bare and I could see the muscles rippling like water-snakes as he moved. It was the face that was the best of him, though, like a great rock it was, with a fine nose, and eyes that burnt through me, shining brighter than the water.

I'd never seen a man like him before, and though I'd never admit it to anyone but yourself, the sight of him made me afraid. O'Shaughanessy, I tells myself, 'tis the fairy king himself, and what's going to happen between now and the morning goodness only knows. But I got no farther in my speculations for the stranger broke in on my thoughts.

"I am the oak," he says, speaking in a voice that sounded like water in a tunnel, "and once in every hundred years for three

nights from the seventh night of the high-summer month I am a man again. It is a spell that is on me, for I married a witch and she did it to gain my kingdom, being greedy of wealth."

"Your kingdom?" I interrupted, gasping a little for I was out of my depth.

"Ay, my kingdom," he answers, "for I was one of the great kings of Ireland though that was so long ago that even the tall mountains have changed, and I mind the time when there was a sweet green isle about a quarter of a mile off the shore from this very spot, though it's been sunk in the cold water more than a thousand years. But that's enough about me, it's yourself I am interested in, seeing that I know you to be a champion wrestler. Are you rich?"

"No, your honour," I says, not knowing what to call him, and wondering that he should know about me at all.

"I've heard people talking of you when sitting in my shade," he says promptly, reading my thoughts, "and if you can wrestle with me and win I'll make you the owner of more gold than ever you can spend. It's the only way to break the spell. I was the greatest fighter in the land and always won every throw. Will you come now, for three nights, and wrestle with me here in the moonlight on this patch of grass? Mind you, it will be a hard fight for there can be no cheating on my part."

Then he was silent, standing there and smiling at me, with an eager look in his bright eyes, though whether it was because he hoped I would beat him and free him of the witch's spell or on account of the prospect of a good bit of wrestling, I did not know. Well, I looked back at him, weighing him up and thinking that whatever his reasons for wanting to fight, it would be the very devil of a battle for he looked as hard and strong as the oak he said he was.

So I asked, "What about the loser's purse? If we go at it here by the lakeside for three nights in succession I'll be in no condition to wrestle for a while after, and it's my living I'll be giving up."

"That's the way of it, is it?" he says. "Then I'll promise you a gold coin for every night you come though I should beat you every time, and it'll be good pay for the coins will bring you luck."

That was good enough for me for he was not the sort of man whose word you'd be doubting and I off with my coat and shirt on the instant.

Seeing this, the tree-king threw down his cloak and a great sword he had slung from his belt that I had not seen before because the cloak covered it. Then he took off his robe and stood up before me, naked except for a bit of what looked like

the fur of some animal about his middle, and all his body nothing but knotted muscle. Then we were off.

No time wasted going round and round looking for an opening, but straight in he came and I met him chest to chest, thinking I'd try his strength and maybe I could hold him until he tired, when I'd try a throw. His arms were around me with his fists seeking the small of my back, and I got a grip about his middle, bending forward to check his little trick. If a man gets his knuckles on the nerves low down by your spine, you've got to go, but I knew the counter to that, of course, and tried the same on him with no success.

'Twas just play at first while we stood a space, testing each other, but by and by I knew I'd found the strongest fighter in Ireland. That man's arms were like bands of iron and his grip like the hand of God. Guile, I says to myself, guile, or you'll never beat him otherwise, and at that very moment what does he do but straighten up, pulling back against my hold, then suddenly yielding, coming forward and throwing all his weight against me and crooking his leg behind my knee. I'd have gone then, but I turned and put him over my thigh and went for an arm lock. But he beat me and was up on his two feet in a second, grinning and panting.

" 'Tis going to be a good fight," he says. " I've never met a better man. One throw each night then, and if you win any one of them I'm a free man again and you'll never need wrestle save for the fine joy of it."

Then we went at it again and three times I thought I had him, and once he broke free of my hands by cunning and twice by main strength, which no man had ever done before. Twice I broke his grip in my own turn, and the third time he put me down, flat on my back.

After that he helps me up, still smiling, and gives me a gold coin from a little pouch he had strung on his sword-belt. Then I went and put on my shirt and coat and when I turned round again there was the oak tree standing on the grass, which was all beaten down where we'd been fighting, and I was alone with the money in my hand.

The next night it was the same way, but he took much longer to make his throw for I was getting the measure of him, and I knew I'd a fair chance of winning on the third night. But I missed my fortune all the same, and this was the way of it.

The moon was high in the sky when I set off for the last match, walking slowly through the wood and jingling the gold coins that I'd got for the other bouts. All of a sudden someone

comes at me through the trees, and the next instant, there in front of me, standing right in my path, was a woman, tall and graceful, with long black hair that blew round her face like a cloak waved in the wind, though the night was still. I knew straightway who she was by the look of her, and the clothes she wore were like nothing women wear nowadays.

She wasted no time, either. " O'Shaughanessy," she snaps, her voice rattling like dry leaves, " you'll not be wrestling with him tonight, or any night. I'm not having that fighting, drunken husband of mine around again, and that'd be the way of it for I know that you will win if you fight once more."

" But I made a promise," says I, " and besides, there's the gold I'd win that would set me up as a rich man for life. Moreover, the poor fellow must be tired of being a tree, though the place will look strange without the oak, and I'll have to find another spot to sit by the water and watch the way the wind plays on it."

" The oak'll still be there whether you win or lose," she comes back at me, " for if you win I'll turn you into a tree in place of my husband. You'll have the gold too, for I'll bury it right under your roots, and there you can stand for a thousand years holding on to your wealth, and much good it will do you."

When she'd finished speaking I saw the eyes of her flash and her black hair flew out in the air, twisting and turning, until I was scared nigh out of my wits. Then she was gone, like a candle that's been puffed out in a dark place.

So all I got out of it was the money for the first two nights, though I went on and explained to the tree-king how it was I couldn't fight him again. When he'd heard what I had to tell, all he said was: " 'Tis a great fighter you are, O'Shaughanessy, but after that threat the heart would be out of you, and if we fought, whatever the result, it would not be fair. I'm thanking you for your kindness and good luck to you."

He was a great gentleman and I felt sorry for him. After that he goes back into being a tree, and we're sitting under it at this very moment, which is why I made you put up your knife; he was a fine fellow and has sorrows enough with a wife like that without being carved about by children.

O'Shaughanessy was silent again, stolidly blowing huge clouds of blue smoke as he drew on his pipe. He was looking straight into the eye of the sun without moving an eyelid.

" What about the coins he gave you? " I asked.

" Och, they looked like edge of a cloud when the sun's setting. I gave one of them to Father Mulligan who showed it to a man in the city who said it was very old and offered to buy it for a tidy

sum. The priest was so pleased he brought his niece round with him one night, knowing I wanted someone to look after the house and thinking she'd make a grand housekeeper—which she did, for I married her in a month. Sure if she isn't the loveliest wife ever a man had. She was the first bit of luck the tree-king's gold brought me, and the best."

"What about the other one?" I persisted.

O'Shaughanessy was quiet for a long while, then: "I have it here," he said. "I got a man to make me a ring of it." He held up an enormous hand, on one finger of which his heavy signet-ring glinted in the sunlight. "'Tis fairy gold and full of luck. I'm keeping it for a rainy day, when I'll put it on a horse."

"Who's cookin', honey?"

BURNT TOAST

The rising sun hung in the sky
like a newly poached egg

BY PENELOPE HUGHES

OUT in the markets and streets of the Piraeus it was very hot. The light shone down so strongly on the ground it looked like a sea of bouncing hailstones, and in the heavy air the dust hung without settling. The sun's rays beat on one's back like drumsticks. Then suddenly one reached the steps of the railway station, and passed into marble coolness, and felt the platform vibrate with an incoming train.

At such a time of day the passengers boarding the train were almost entirely business men from the shipping companies of the Piraeus; city men, jostling onto the train with the rudeness of city anonymity and using fat, soft briefcases as buffers. The one empty briefcase in the carriage got trapped between their legs and, being empty, writhed and doubled up weakly. It was carried by a short elderly Englishman.

With difficulty he pushed his way through, and settled himself carefully in a seat like a tulip bulb in its hole in the flower bed. Somehow he seemed incongruous: the wrinkles of his old hands were traced with at least two days' grime, yet he flicked his ticket under his watchstrap with the suavity of a regular city commuter.

Opposite him was a garish picture of the statue of Demosthenes: *Demosthenes says, " O Men of Athens, drink Loutraki Water! "* He sat himself bolt upright, staring straight through it, stiffly. He was so stiff and angular he seemed to be padded. And indeed he was: presently, without moving his head, he began patting the sleeves of his jacket, and slowly pulled out first six large blue forms, and then two thick yellow brochures curved to the shape of his upper arm. He laid them on the briefcase on his knee and went on dreaming.

And as the train rocked across the Plain of Attica, past dye factories and the endless backs of houses, first one and then another of the creased printed forms fell off his knee and floated away under the seats.

Yesterday Wrygon Todd had set out from the Piraeus by

caïque, representative (for the time being) of the British Electricity Company in Greece. He was engaged on a plan for installing a miniature generating plant in the harbour town of one of the small islands of the Cyclades; and his briefcase *bulged*, then, with engineers' estimates and pink and yellow questionnaires, as he stepped on board in the early morning.

As the caïque passed Sunium Point, the island he was going to was merely a smudge above the horizon, but within an hour they were near enough to see a small cloud floating above it; and by midday they were close inshore, following round the coast. As the caïque nosed its way from rock to rock, an inland village, built on the crown of a mountain, suddenly swung into sight from behind the hills, its white walls gleaming in the sunlight.

Wrygon Todd, with his briefcase balanced on the rail, imagined pylons marching grandly up towards it across the hills from the generator in the port. He became so excited that he began stumping up and down the deck, with his thumbs clasped behind him, and his tweed hat with the ventilation holes and the cuckoo's feather in the band pulled well down over his eyes to keep out the blaze. From behind, his legs looked so short he was rather like an Alexander beetle.

He entered into conversation with a Greek; a handsome Greek, with *Orestes* embroidered in scarlet on his shirt in the American manner. Wrygon asked him if he knew where the Demarchos lived—or whatever Headman of the island there was. Orestes had last visited the island ten years before, and his description had the vague precision of a dream: "When you are going along the harbour front you come to a house with a verandah of seven vines. There are nets hanging on the wall to dry."

Wrygon asked how far it was.

"I do not remember. But it must have been at the edge of the town, because on a hot day you could smell the resin of the thorn bushes even inside the house . . . That's the old Demarchos, of course, there may be a new one now. He was a very learned man: he had been to Bristol, and knew all about your Churchill, and Mr. Harrypoll." A chicken, escaped from the stern of the boat, scuttled past, and he turned to chase it.

A child stood staring at Wrygon's foreign bow-tie, but he did not notice. He was thinking over the working-diagrams and the blueprints, the pink and yellow forms he had brought with him. After a moment he withdrew out of the wind and began arranging them alternately to look decorative.

In his old age he had devised for himself a system of forms that was extremely decorative.

The caïque was nearly there, and fondly he returned all the

papers to his briefcase. As they neared the harbour the wind suddenly wafted him a quite distinct smell, as of burnt toast. "But how absurd!" he told himself, "of course you could not smell burnt toast from out here!" and he patted the expansive belly of his briefcase, saying aloud to himself with half a grin, "That's right, be businesslike, sir!"

The caïque rounded the rocks and turned in through the mouth of the harbour. And then he saw that the whole town had been gutted by fire.

It was still smouldering in places, and the townspeople were encamped outside it. The Captain wanted to hurry straight past to the next island for help, but Wrygon insisted on being set down. As he was stepping ashore, alone, Orestes reappeared and said good-bye. "Go to the Good," he said; and as they shook hands their two gold rings flashed together in the sunlight.

Wrygon stood alone on the quay with his briefcase in his hand and looked about him. Like seats in a theatre, the houses were crowded together in a half-circle round the harbour, one on top of another, so steeply that the fire had spread straight from the roof of one house to the doors of the one above. For a moment he was bewildered and shifted uncomfortably inside his shell.

The town was utterly empty: empty even of shadows, under the Mediterranean sun.

Wrygon laid his briefcase down tenderly behind a stone bollard and began to stump up the hillside, to offer his sympathies and assistance. It was so steep that in places he had to climb on all fours, and he cut his thumb on a broken piece of pink china poking out from under the rubble. Many of the ruins were hardly even recognizable as houses: what had once been solid planks were shrivelled into mere bars; it was as if the whole place had been skinned and dried. Certainly he must offer to help the townspeople with their salvage work.

He found the Demarchos at length—sitting on the ground outside the town with the children playing knucklebones around him, idly picking away the sides of an uneven hole burnt in his jacket and smiling to himself. His grandchild, for lack of a doll, was plaiting the dog's tail into six small plaits. From beyond them came the sound of a fisherman's song. Wrygon Todd gravely raised his old tweed hat.

His habit of formality made it necessary to express his sympathy for the village in the kind of language that would have befitted an illuminated address. And the Demarchos, without the remote look on his old face changing, shook hands and hospitably offered him half his jacket to sit on. Electricity was not talked of, of course. But, somehow, not salvage either.

A bee settled on Wrygon's knee. " That's one of mine," the Demarchos said fondly.

" *I* used to keep bees," said Wrygon. " Where do they feed? "

The Demarchos turned, and pointed. A couple of water-courses twisted up into the hills from the harbour, wild plum and rhododendron completely hiding the streams, their branching trunks a baroque confusion.

The bee suddenly zigzagged away across the ruins.

" I shall do a little clearing," said Wrygon, rising, and using the departure of the bee as a vague pretext for taking his leave.

He scrambled down the hill again, to pioneer in the ruins alone. He had a passionate love for pioneering, which contrasted oddly with the formality of his manners; it was because of this love that as an engineer he had remained all his life wholly unqualified and unattached, he suddenly realized with surprise—engaged now in this enterprise, now that. It was curious to realize it so late . . . his dry old face suddenly crumpled into a broad grin as he began working.

Choosing a great iron bedpost out of the rubble to act as a crowbar, he leaned back, skilfully using his weight as leverage, his movements as formal as his conversation with the Demarchos had been. Somehow these ruins, which looked as public as an archaeologist's midden, had to be restored to some semblance of private property. He began emptying the ruins by heaping rubble out of them into the streets.

It did not worry him that no one at all had come to help him. Greeks never interfere with the past—even the recent past. Greeks are improvisers. Behind one house stood a fig tree with shrivelled leaves: its roots had grown right through the back wall, and there they had been neatly cut off so that the stubs could be used as pegs to hang things. That was typical.

Yes, he *liked* these people for being content to camp up there in the open, instead of struggling backwards against fate: for improvising the atmosphere of " home " out of empty air, and living on just as competently without any of the normal conveniences of living. England, even when he had left it, had been too full of the right things used for the right purposes.

From the inland village which he had seen from the caïque five thin little mules came plodding down the track with relief supplies. But they also came no farther than the encampment above the town, where their masters dismounted and sat down on the ground. A lazy murmur of voices occasionally floated down to where Wrygon was working, but more often it was drowned by the sound of the cicadas sawing busily away.

The heavy scent of wild thyme and resin filled the nostrils.

The town itself was silent except once, when the silence was broken by the crash of yet another roof collapsing. Immediately afterwards a cloud of dust rose above the ruin, and hung there as if the very air was too heavy to allow it to subside again. Wrygon went on working, and a cockerel stalking about among the ruins stood disconcertingly close and watched him, its head on one side and its eyes half shut to keep out the blaze.

Gradually the sun swung past its zenith, and the short shadows began to lengthen. Wrygon, beginning to tire, exchanged his crowbar for the charred leg of a little chair and, holding it like a divining-rod, began to explore the town. It was then he came, at last, on what must have been the house of the Demárchos—the blackened shreds of nets still hanging on the wall outside, the seven charred stumps. Next door was the taverna, roofless. And inside he found a donkey standing, patiently shifting its feet on the hot ground. He began to write up angrily: *It is forbidden to tie up* . . . and then stopped, noticing it was a mantelpiece he was writing on. He patted the donkey and decided to go back to his work with the crowbar.

He passed along the harbour front with his thumbs clasped together behind his back, and saw families collecting scraps of driftwood. They were beginning to light fires on the quay near their boats; and the autumn smell of woodsmoke, blue in the still evening air, came to his nostrils.

He went back to his heaving, suddenly feeling sad. Time moved past him too quickly now. He thought of a house in England with tigers' heads on the wall, high enough not to frighten his friends' little grandchildren. There should be a miniature railway from the kitchen to the dining-room, and mornings with the smell of fresh polish. Wearily Wrygon laid down his crowbar.

The sun was setting. As he came out into the doorway its light struck him full in the eyes, dazzling him. When he had adjusted his eyes he saw that the Demarchos was approaching across the rubble, with several other men. The Demarchos introduced them, and they all shook hands and bowed. The Demarchos said they hoped he would give them the honour of his company for supper.

"It would give me great pleasure," Wrygon replied, and bowed again. His language had hardened into formal ruts with the years, like his features. He felt stiff and exhausted, and the great heaps of rubble he had cleared seemed to rear up at him like breaking seas. The light had gone too damn moderate anyway, he comforted himself.

The Demarchos bowed to him to go first, and the procession

moved towards the harbour front. In the rays of the setting sun their long shadows were even more erect and formal than they.

After supper they sat on and on round the fire talking, while the cold began to pluck at them from outside the warm circle of light. They asked him what his job was, and he told them how he had started.

"In Carlisle they were charging the earth for wiring the old stone houses. Crazy great drills they were using, and boring right through solid granite. I said I could do any house for ten quid. How? I used ferrets to take the wires: they could always find a cranny somewhere, somehow, and wriggle through."

It was just the kind of story to warm Greeks on a cold night. They laughed, and shifted, and told many other Odysseus-stories, while Wrygon made his back comfortable against a stone bollard and watched the constellations rise behind the hill and steadily wheel up overhead. The cold slowly crept upwards from their feet, holding their limbs in a numb grip where they sat. Now the talk turned to the intricacies of Greek politics. Without closing his eyes, Wrygon dozed, his old brain weary of it.

He was woken by a stirring of the people round the dying fire, and shifted his position in the darkness. The coil of old hawser beside him was cold with dew. He shivered, and looked towards the fire. Someone had found his briefcase, and they were handing out all those papers in it as padding against the cold. Everyone was crowding round. Wrygon received his share, and sleepily stuffed it up his sleeves and inside his jacket, and lay down again. Immediately he felt better.

Sleep came suddenly, wrapping his limbs round like a blanket, but his mind went on roaring. He turned over onto his side, and there came a beating in his ears that grew and grew, as if his brain were patiently trying to bang its way out . . . Thoughts came so fast he was only in time to see their going.

Once, when he made a conscious effort to recall them, he found: *He said to his hermits, Go away with your termites!*—but what he *saw* was a paper figure labelled Electricity scampering away across the hillside, pursued by angry bees. And then his thoughts were away again, a rollicking tune, and his consciousness was a puppet that could not dance fast enough to keep up. Now it billowed into a luxurious description of woods and sloping fields. He floated lightly into oblivion.

At dawn the cock that had watched him so curiously the day before began its crowing. As Wrygon stirred and looked about him the weekly packet-boat was chugging into the harbour. He got up and walked towards it, feeling as stiff as a doll, and the

Demarchos came to see him off. As they walked along the quay together they saw ahead of them some people on the rocks beyond.

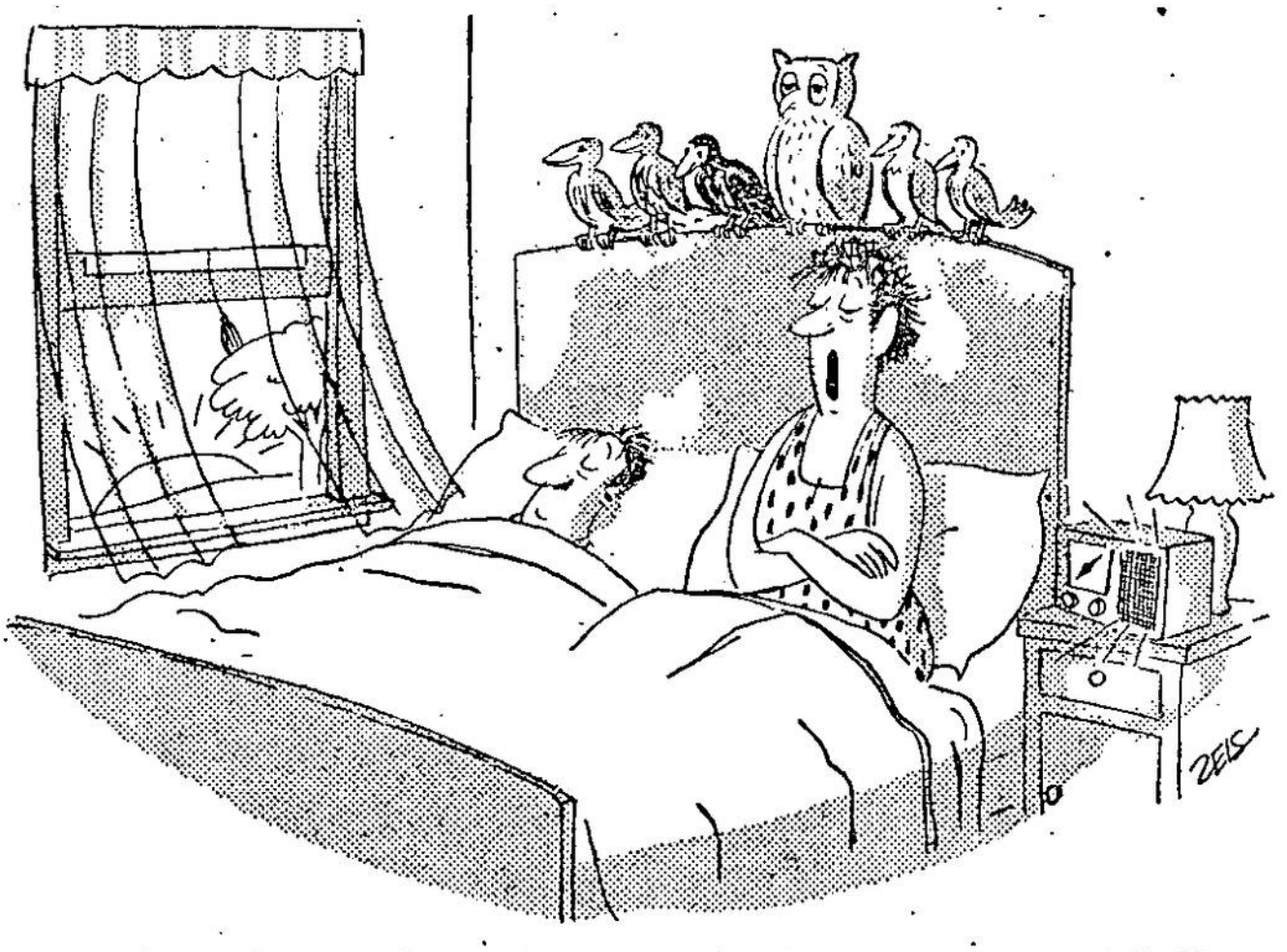
"Ah, there are my boys," said the Demarchos, "catching octopus for lunch." He paused, then added, "Sometimes you grasp the octopus, sometimes the octopus grasps you... There's no *right* way. Both ways, he is eaten in the end..."

Suddenly he remembered something, and turned back, returning with the briefcase, now quite empty. And though they were as different as two shells of old men could be, Wrygon suddenly felt for the serene lazy old Demarchos a great affection.

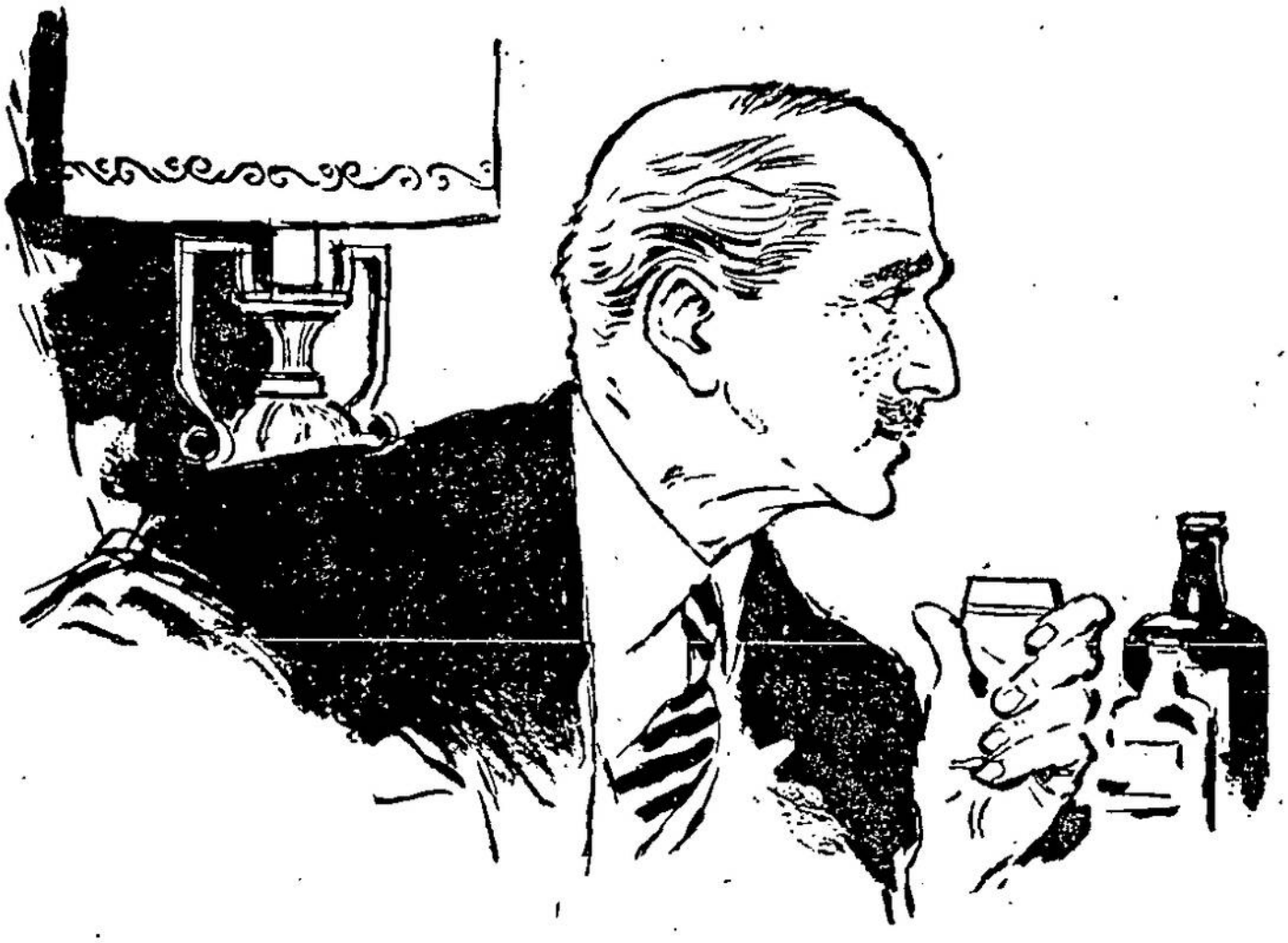
The Demarchos was kissing him on both cheeks and saying, "Go to the Good;" the rising sun hung in the sky like a madman's newly poached egg, and the whole village had come to see him off. As he stood in the stern of the boat, he smelt the smell of the rhododendrons that grew up the watercourse—an exotic smell that contrasted with the homely one of burnt toast...

What did it matter that he had lost all his blueprints, all his pink and yellow forms, decorative though they were? He was free to start something else. It was jungle he enjoyed tidying rather than garden.

"*No* right way? What nonsense!" As he was jogged along by packet-boat and train towards the heart of Athens his dry old brain was busy. Busy improvising a dozen ingenious devices for catching octopus.



"According to the radio, we had quite a storm last night"



"I'VE got one already, of course," explained the Brigadier, "but we'd better step off with the right foot and have a new one. I'm out now, you know."

"So I hear, sir," said the young man. "How about this for size?"

"The brim's too curly," said the Brigadier, "I'd prefer something like *that*."

The bowler was placed squarely on his balding head.

"Too large, sir," said the young man, lifting the hat gently from Eustace Dodman's ears. "But I know what you mean. I'll be back in a jiffy, sir."

Brigadier Dodman was left to look at himself in the long gilt Victorian mirror which in some respects dominates the whole interior of Lock's; and what he saw he didn't particularly like. Although his skin was still brown from the four years he had recently spent as Military Governor of the Polyearic Islands, little purple veins stood out in an irregular criss-cross of mosaic on both cheeks and either side of an aquiline nose. His eyes were still blue and clear and direct. His ears protruded a little too far, but this was somehow compensated by greying, sparse tufts of hair on each side of his thin, bald head.

He allowed his eyes to wander . . . perhaps for the last time . . . over the uniform, imposing with Brigadier's red tabs and insignia, and a faded ribbon of the M.C. "Into mothballs," he said to

The Brigadier

BY OLIVER MOXON

Author of "Bitter Monsoon," etc.

himself, then aloud: "They're bound to want me back, sooner or later."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the young man, bouncing out from behind a purple curtain.

"Nothing," said the Brigadier.

"Try these, will you, sir?" After three attempts the Brigadier nodded.

"That'll do." Ludicrous, he thought, a bowler on top of uniform. "I'm going to change at the club, so you'd better wrap it up. I'll pay cash."

"Oh, that's not necessary, sir . . ."

"I'd prefer to," said the old man emphatically.

When he walked into St. James's Street a bitter February wind was hurling its prongs across the park and seemed to gain force as it bit around the Palace, tearing at the round cardboard box in the Brigadier's hand. He bent into the gale and forced his thin legs forward into Pall Mall; then he turned into the Safari Club, a little out of breath, and went straight to the hall porter's desk. "Any mail, Bosworth?" he panted.

The aged servant skimmed through a shallow pile of letters. "No mail today, sir, but there's a message from Major Segrave, would you ring him, sir, it's not important, but some time today if possible."

"Did he leave a number?"

"His club, sir."

Eustace Dodman went upstairs. For many years he had kept a

suit of civilian clothes at his club, though it had never entered his head until today that they would ever be used for this particular occasion. The valet had laid them out neatly in one of the club's spacious dressing-rooms and now, as he started to discard his Sam Browne, his tunic, and finally his well-pressed trousers, he allowed little fragments of the past to saunter across a brain which had never been much good at dwelling on things, and no good at all at imagination.

His service career had been more or less cut to pattern . . . subaltern during the Irish Rebellion, staff Captain in the First World War, adjutant of his battalion in the late 1920's, Commander of the battalion in the 1930's, full Colonel commanding a sub-district during most of the Second World War, and finally, as a sort of titbit of triumph, the appointment to the Military Governorship of the Polyearics.

He had never married. To start with, he had been too poor, and it was as much as he could do to settle his mess bills from a subaltern's pay. Latterly, when perhaps he could have afforded the plunge, two factors stood firmly in the way: he never ran across a woman who was both available and desirable; and he had, by this time, fallen in love with his regiment. There had been his mother to care for, too, until her death three years ago, and although Eustace had been in some ways relieved, he became very conscious of the fact that he was quite alone in the world.

It was the past four years that preoccupied him most.

How vividly he remembered that sunny, pale day when the banana boat sailed into Port MacAndrew and discharged its plumaged cargo with all the pomp of a royal tour: the cobbled quayside lined with native troops; the band pounding out strident marches in tom-tom rhythm. He had inspected the troops, shaken hands with councillors, civic officials, most of the British colony and their wives. He had looked quite striking in his white uniform and plumed cocked hat, and a little later, when he was being driven in an open car through pot-holed streets to the Military Governor's Residence, he felt proud and happy all in one.

Those four years *had* been happy. He soon learnt to organize and administer the large plantation-style house with its lawned garden and swimming-pool as efficiently as any woman. He thoroughly enjoyed it, particularly the garden parties, which he was required by local custom to hold twice a year.

But now, on this bitter February day, Brigadier Dodman stood looking down at the long woollen underpants that clutched the contours of his bony knees. On the bed his uniform lay discarded, folded in a neat pile. Then, very quickly, he dressed in his blue serge suit and regimental tie, and rang for the valet.

" My uniform," he said, " will you pack it into a box, Nutter, with mothballs, and send it to my rooms? Bosworth will give you the address."

" Very good, sir," said the ancient valet. " It's good to see you home, sir, and I don't suppose you'll be going away again now."

"No," said the Brigadier, "I shouldn't think so." He took the bowler from its box and went downstairs. It was hard to realize that the army's doors were shut behind him, tight as clams; but it was not so hard to acknowledge that what lay ahead of him was more terrifying than anything he had ever known. Out here, in the loose wideness of civilian life, people thought differently and acted differently, and he was far from certain that he would like it.

Still clutching his bowler, he went into the bar and ordered a large pink gin. Can't do so much of this now, he mused, not on eight-thirty-five a year, less tax. Call it fourteen pounds a week. It's going to be a job. Three guineas a week for the room, plus breakfast; call it a fiver for meals . . . Oh well, he'd manage somehow. He'd have to.

Out in the hall he told the porter: "Call Major Segrave at the United Services, will you?"

"Very good, sir. It will come through in Box 2, sir."

"Thank you, Bosworth." When the telephone tinkled Major Segrave was already on the line. "Hullo, Mike," said the Brigadier, "I had a message to ring you."

"Oh hullo, sir"—a deep cheerful voice—"I heard you were back. Have a pleasant trip?"

"Fine, thanks. Wonderful send-off. How's the battalion?"

"Splendid. We're down at Bagshot now, y'know. Jim Perkins jumped the gun and got command."

"Rather a pity, I think. I hoped they'd give it to you, Mike. I told Mil. Sec. I thought you ought to have it, but I suppose all this seniority nonsense came first."

"I don't mind really, sir." There was a short pause. "What are you doing next?"

"I finished today, Mike. I'm out. I'm a mothballed Brigadier." Both men giggled at the unexpected joke.

Then the major grasped the full implication: "Good heavens, sir, that was a bit of a shock for you."

"A bit," said the Brigadier, "after forty years. Tell Jack Morris and Billy they mustn't neglect me. I'm all alone in London."

"I'm going down tonight. I'll tell 'em all right. Look, sir, we'll all be in town next Tuesday. Mother's giving a little party. My sister—you've never met my sister—she'll be there, too. Jack and Billy and some of the new ones are coming up with me. Do you think you could make it, sir?"

"I'd love to," said the Brigadier without hesitation.

"Splendid. We've still got the house in Chenniston Square. Come about six-thirty."

"Thank you, Mike, thank you very much." They rang off. Eustace Dodman went back to the bar and ordered another large pink gin. Perhaps it wouldn't be so bad after all. The boys had never let him down yet.

The Cromwell Road was still dark and quiet when Brigadier Dodman awoke next day. With the trained precision, which for

many years and in all circumstances had triggered off his own mental alarm at exactly the same time each morning, his eyes opened and he sat bolt upright in bed, and before his brain had started to work, he automatically shouted, " Edgbaston! " But his batman did not come, and Eustace Dodman lay back in the narrow bed, remembering with something near to horror that Edgbaston was many miles away.

A milk cart rattled its fractious way along the street. A few minutes later his landlady, who yesterday had seemed very pleased to accommodate a full-blown Brigadier, hustled into the room with tea, plonked the tray by his bed, and announced, " 'Ere we are, dearie. Breakfast in 'arf an hour."

He thought for a second that he had better put her right on terms of address, so there wouldn't be any argument later on, but instead he just said, " Thank you, *Mrs.* Williams," with pointed emphasis on the Mrs. And when she had gone he thought: What can you expect for three guineas a week?

Then very slowly, rather like the methodical lengthening of a domino line, he began to unwrap his day; his first full day as a civilian. And already the empty hours seemed to pile on top of him in an endless succession of little black squares. The teacup shook a little as he raised it to his lips, but this was nothing to do with the two pink gins he had had the night before. As the consciousness of *day* increased, it brought a mounting tenseness, a series of chaotic apprehensions that all added up to one thing: he was scared stiff. Add to this the anaemic brew in place of Edgbaston's strong brown garrum char, and it becomes not surprising that the early-morning mottle on Brigadier Dodman's face was creased with little lines of worry.

An hour later, when the winter morning had spread a dim light through the heavy overcast, the Brigadier left his lodgings, turned left along the Cromwell Road, and struck out in the direction of Knightsbridge. A breakfast of finnan haddock and toast had cheered him a little. So had the bowler hat. It fitted very well, and he found that a slight tilt over the right ear produced a distinguished, vaguely rakish effect which went well with his clipped military moustache.

" They'll be able to tell," he assured himself, " it's almost as good as a uniform. They'll know I'm army, all right."

As he walked along the gusty road he began to plan his daily routines. Military experience told him that if things were done at a certain pace, in a certain order, great chunks of time could be sliced out of the days and this, more than anything else, was what he subconsciously wanted. He would leave the house at nine-fifteen.

He had already formed a passive dislike for his room and there was no point staying there longer than necessary. In any case, it would give the impression that he had a purpose if he left early and at the same time each morning.

This first morning he decided to walk a reasonable distance,

and then catch a bus to St. James's Street. He reached Harrods before boarding a number fourteen. Being the morning rush-hour, the buses were crammed and he found himself standing on the platform clinging precariously to the upright handrail when the vehicle started forward. They had not gone twenty yards when the bell rang in three brisk clangs and the bus slewed to a sudden stop. An irate conductor pounded downstairs. " Don't yer know the ruddy rules? " he shouted hysterically. " No standing on the platform. Off yer get, go on, off yer get."

Eustace Dodman remained, impassive, looking around for the culprit. The conductor stood squarely before him, arms akimbo, head slightly askew in an attitude of aggressive admonition. Passengers inside the bus were looking on with interest, anxious for any diversion to break the tedium of going to work.

The conductor tried again. " You," he said, " wiv a bowler, off this bus."

The Brigadier turned very slowly. " Are you talking to me? " he asked levelly.

" You 'eard," said the conductor, temper urging in red ripples up his neck. " Make it snappy, you're keeping the bus waiting."

The rim of the Brigadier's hat tingled against the sides of his head. For a moment he was speechless, then: " Who the devil do y' think you're talking to? "

The words spluttered out before he could marshal his thoughts, but despite the excited titters of passengers nearest the entrance he waded on: " If you want me to leave this bus you make the request in a civil manner, understand? "

" All right, all right, tosh." The conductor appeared to become bored. " I just want you to get off the bus, that's all. Why make my life a misery, eh? "

This casual dismissal of a serious matter angered the Brigadier to the periphery of his self-control. Pressure behind the little purple veins on his cheeks swelled them into a contused whole of mauve rage. " I'm a Brigadier," he shouted, " say *sir* when you speak to me—*sir*, d'y' understand? "

The conductor froze, speechless, and Eustace Dodman stepped with ponderous, shaking dignity into the gutter. It was a matter of profound good fortune that a taxi happened to be passing, and a moment later he was lying back panting with rage and able only to indicate to the driver the general direction he wished to take with a curt gesture of his trembling hand.

He closed his eyes and breathed deeply, muttering little monosyllabic ejaculations from time to time, and they were well past Fortnum's before he realized they had missed the turning down St. James's. He pulled himself up on the strap and rapped on the window. " The Safari Club. Go by Duke Street, will you? I forgot to tell you . . ."

" Very good, sir," said the driver. " I was wonderin' when you was going to wake up, sir." The two *sirs* in one sentence did a little to heal the wound, but almost immediately he realized that

taxis, from now on, would be few and far between. The price on the meter, for even the shortest journey, was incompatible with a Brigadier's pension, and he was miserably aware that he would have to meet bus conductors for the rest of his life.

At the Safari he paid the cab and tipped the driver sixpence; then he climbed the marble steps, pushed through the big swing doors, and stopped at Bosworth's desk. "Any letters for me?" he asked.

The porter scarcely looked up. "No, sir, no mail today."

"Thank you, Bosworth," said the Brigadier.

He went into the smoking-room on the first floor, where all the daily newspapers were laid out in neat rows for the convenience of members, and settled himself into a deep leather chair to pass the hours before bar opening. It was now just fifteen minutes before ten o'clock. In a few moments, he thought, Sir Benjamin will come in. It will be nice to see Benjy again. Then it came to him that it was four years since they had last met, and for all he knew, Benjy might be dead. But his fears were unfounded, for precisely at ten-ten that ancient, bearded gentleman hovered into the room, stopped for an instant at the door, then crabbed across the carpet to Eustace Dodman. He sat down before either of them spoke.

"Well, Eustace, this is a nice surprise." For an old man his voice was remarkably crisp. "When did you get home?"

"I'm out of the army, Benjy, got the sack yesterday."

"Oh," said his companion without emotion, "I suppose it's about time."

"Nonsense," said the Brigadier, "I'm fit for another ten years. There weren't any jobs, that's why."

"You've got to give the youngsters a chance, Eustace. Where are you living, old chap?"

"I have rooms in Kensington. I have to watch the pennies now, Benjy. It's an insult to forty years' service and it won't be easy to keep up the dignity of senior rank on eight-thirty-five a year."

"I imagine you've got some tucked away," said Sir Benjamin urbanely.

"A little," Dodman lied, "but tax on the unearned stuff is crippling. That's unjust, too, savings should be tax-free."

"I quite agree," and after a pause, "Tell me, Eustace, about the Polyearics."

The Brigadier lay back in his deep leather chair, placed the tips of his fingers together, and for an hour or so was happily lost in his matter-of-fact account of the past four years. Other elderly gentlemen had by now wraithed silently into the great room and although from time to time Sir Benjamin looked up and nodded to an acquaintance, the Brigadier was conscious of nothing but the passing parade of civic lunches, military parades, and official garden parties, and when his old friend rose stiffly to his feet to make for "matins," there was still much to tell. On their purposeful journey down to

the bar Eustace Dodman continued to talk, and it was not until Sir Benjamin politely excused himself that he was obliged to curtail his reveries and jolt back to the unsavoury present. His glass was empty, and a further hour had to be filled before lunch.

The barman, Coutts, filled his glass, and he allowed it to stand on the bar for quite a little while before raising it for a sip. In this way it could be made to last and it wouldn't look as though he was skimping. His eyes were fixed vacantly on the rows of bottles. Presently a voice directly behind him cried, "Eustace, dear old Eustace, back from the colonies. Have a drink?"

The Brigadier turned at once. Christopher Gorman-Blount was already pumping his hand and shouting to Coutts at the same time, "What's the Brigadier toping these days, Coutts? Gin? Make it a double. It's mighty nice to see you, Eustace," and, turning to a companion at his side, he continued without drawing breath, "This is Colonel Beckett, won't be long before we're axed too, eh, Geoffrey? Well, cheers, Eustace, happy retirement."

Brigadier Dodman looked with dismay at the large, new pink gin at his elbow, and the large golden Scotches in the hands of his companions, and a quick mental calculation told him that the round had cost fifteen shillings. Without question he'd have to stand a return today. How could you stand aloof from your fellow members in the bar without appearing mean? How could you chat the hours away without standing a round from time to time?

"Same again, Coutts." He spoke the words with commendable nonchalance. The two colonels drained their glasses and thumped them on the counter and a fresh round gurgled from the chromium. Unaccountably, the Brigadier began to feel quite cheerful. He was able to recount again his experiences in the Polyearics to an appreciative audience and by the time Beckett's round came up the distasteful episode of the fourteen bus, and all his current apprehensions were washed clean away.

That night he sat on the edge of his narrow bed and added up the day. The two-bar electric fire had not yet warmed the bleak, sparse room and his hands shook a little as he jotted the figures down on the back of an envelope.

1 taxi	2s.	9d.
2 small pink gins	5s.	0d.
1 round	15s.	0d.
1 lunch	9s.	6d.
1 tea	1s.	6d.
2 small pink gins	5s.	0d.
1 dinner (Club)	6s.	6d.
coffee in smoke-room		6d.
bus home		4d.
cigarettes	3s.	7d.
	£2 9s.	8d.

In one day, without any real high jinks, he had spent his budget for half a week.

Gradually the implication numbed through his brain and settled over his body in a shiver of uncertainty. " I must try to get a job. I'll start hunting tomorrow, it will give me something to do," were the only practical thoughts that occurred to him. Deep down inside he knew that life from now on was going to be little better than hell.

He lay awake a long time, listening to youthful revellers in the street, to the very distant hoot of tugboats on the river, to the mellow night chimes from Brompton Oratory; until, prompted by nothing, he remembered Mike Segrave's party, and he fell asleep, as small boys do, looking forward to a treat.

The weekend had passed very slowly. He had done nothing except sit in the club, chat with Benjy, and take a quick walk through the park.

He had noticed, with a little twinge of joy, that crocuses were already nudging their pretty heads through the grass, which meant spring, and, who knows, perhaps one of the boys would invite him away for a weekend.

Now it was Tuesday morning. The evening was still very distant, but Eustace Dodman felt anticipation building up inside him as the minutes ticked by. He had skimmed through all the daily papers in the smoke-room, and was thrown back on trade papers for his morning's browse.

The one he chose concerned the book trade. It seemed more diverting than the *Muckshifters' Record* or any of the engineering magazines, and he lay back in his chair and casually flicked the pages. It was therefore not surprising that his eyes soon fell on the *Situations Vacant* column. One of these notices absorbed his particular attention.

It ran: *Responsible man, ex-army preferably, required general duties with new, progressive publishing firm. Commencing £6 per week. Prospects. Apply Box 284.*

Nonchalantly Dodman scribbled the box number in his diary, sauntered into the writing-room, and sat down at the remotest table. Then, with careful precision, he tore off the top of a sheet of club notepaper and wrote a letter, adding the address of his room where the club's address should have been.

Dear Sirs, I have seen your announcement, and although I have no previous experience I feel I may suit your purpose. I am ex-army, age 55, and fairly quick in the uptake. Perhaps you could give me an interview?

Yours faithfully,
E. S. Dodman

Then he walked up to the post office in Jermyn Street, bought a twopence-halfpenny stamp, and slipped the letter in the box with a quick, guilty movement.

He had already decided to arrive at Mike Segrave's in a taxi. But Chenniston Square was some distance away and with a cunning somewhat alien to his character he had made up his mind to bus it as far as halfway down Sloane Street and hire a cab for the last two hundred yards. This simple manœuvre would save at least a bob.

Mike Segrave opened the door. "This is splendid, sir. Do come in. I thought the cab must have been you."

"You're looking older, Mike," said the Brigadier. "Four years of pink gins, I suppose."

"*You* haven't changed a bit, sir. Just leave your hat on the stand and come and meet everyone." They entered a room off the hall. "You remember my mother . . .?"

"Brigadier Dodman, how nice. I hear you've just got back from governing the Polyearics—tell me, where *are* the Polyearics? Awfully ignorant of me, I know, but it's slipped my memory . . ."

The Brigadier smiled and accepted a thimbleful of gin from a young girl at his elbow, and managed to get out: "In the Indian Ocean, ma'am," before he was being surrounded by young men in hacking-jacket suits and his hand shaken with enthusiastic *hullo, sirs.*

There were Jack Morris and Billy, who had been his G.S.O. 2's in Eastern Command, John Cavendish-Spearman, his adjutant in the battalion in prewar days and himself a half-colonel now, one or two familiar faces he could not place, and one or two new ones belonging to very young men.

They were all speaking at once, and he was filled with the happiness of a father returning to his family after long years away. The girl was at his elbow again, holding out another glass. Mike said, "You've not met my little sister, sir. This is Gillian, Gil for short. She has orders to keep you topped up."

The Brigadier turned to the girl at his side and smiled as charmingly as he knew. "A very admirable instruction," he said. "How d'you do, Gil."

He did not shake hands, but when his eyes met hers he somehow felt that he had known her all his life. A sensation of immediate familiarity coursed through him and for a fleeting second the warm, amused smile on Gil's lips sent a little ripple of embarrassment through his body. Then she spoke, "I've heard so much about you, Brigadier. Mike always says you were the best C.O. a battalion could have."

He blushed profoundly, unchecked. "Good heavens," he said, "I'm sure *that's* not right."

Mike Segrave slapped his sister on the buttocks. "What *will* she come out with next," he apologized to the Brigadier, "she never seems to grow up."

"There's plenty of time for being grown up," Dodman remarked sagely. "How old are you, Gil?"

"Twenty," she said, "I came out two years ago, an austerity deb, you know, so I don't know what he's talking about." The

others had drifted away in little knots, and he found himself alone with the girl. Oddly enough, he felt completely at ease, despite the fact that in recent years he had found very young people rather hard to get along with. Now, while she talked in a glib, quick chatter, he allowed his eyes to wander discreetly across her face and pierce again the frank blueness of her wide, laughing eyes. Her complexion was that pale milky pinkness peculiar to well-bred English girls, and whilst her hair was a golden fairness, her eyebrows and lips were delicately coloured to accentuate the symmetrical contours of a very pretty face. Mike's got a beautiful sister, thought the Brigadier, and he suddenly realized that he had not listened to a word she had been saying.

" I'm sorry, Gil, could you say that again? " he covered. " Billy was shouting at the other end."

She giggled. " I said I remembered the Polyearics from school. Don't they grow copra there, or something? "

" It's a fuelling-station too. Quite important really. You must go there some time. Port MacAndrew isn't much, but some of the other islands are quite delightful. I'd like to take you and show you around, but I don't suppose I'll ever go anywhere now."

Jack Morris interrupted. " Gil, you can't keep the Brigadier all to yourself. Can I introduce you to some of the new boys, sir? This is David Penny . . . and this is Walter Flack-Furness, he only joined the 2nd Battalion two months ago." Eustace Dodman reluctantly allowed himself to be steered across the room and it was not until he was due to leave that he was able to smile at Gil again and say, " Well, how's it going? "

She was staring at him intently. " Mike says you've retired. How on earth will you fill the time now? It must be awful to retire."

" It's too early to say yet—so far I've just been a bit lonely. When I settle down I think perhaps I shall get a job, just to fill the time."

" You must come and see us, as often as you like," she murmured earnestly.

" May I? It's very kind of you. And perhaps Lady Segrave will allow you to . . . er . . . come to a theatre with a very old man. Do you like the theatre? "

" I adore it, however rotten the play is. Please arrange it very soon."

" Very soon," said Eustace Dodman, trying not to appear excited. " I must go now. Thank you for being so kind."

After he had left, Lady Segrave said to her son, " What an absolute dear, I'd quite forgotten how *nice* he is."

" He's a pet," said Gil, " an absolute darling."

" He's the best of the breed," said Mike, " but I think he'll feel awfully out of things now. We must make a point of looking him up when we come to town," he added to his brother officers. They agreed, enthusiastically, and turned back to planning dinner at Quag's.

Eustace Dodman walked to Knightsbridge and took a bus to South Kensington, where he ate a plate of baked beans on toast; then he went home and turned in early, feeling happier than he imagined possible. Just before he slept Gil's head got all muddled up with the yellow crocuses, and they all turned somersaults and cartwheels, and only her eyes remained stationary in the middle, looking candidly into his.

Francis Lowater (Publishers) Ltd. had, like many of the newer firms, chosen offices in S.W.1.

Eustace Dodman now stood in a small ante-room on the second floor. He had received Lowater's reply to his application only the day before. It had been brief and to the point: *Please call at any time suitable to yourself during a weekday morning, before eleven-thirty.* (Opening time, thought the Brigadier.) This morning he had left his bowler behind and wore the oldest of his three suits, replacing the regimental tie with a plain black one.

Presently a buxom, florid young lady appeared from an office marked "Private," smoothed her plain grey costume over two accentuated breasts, and said to him: "Mr. Mordaunt-Graham, the sales manager, will see you now. This way, please." She led the Brigadier through the door marked "Private," and he found himself standing in front of a small, littered desk behind which a languid young man sprawled and grinned laconically at the visitor. After a brief inspection he motioned to an upright chair and Eustace Dodman sat down, stiffly.

Mr. Mordaunt-Graham opened a file and produced the sawn-off sheet of club notepaper, glanced at it, then back at the Brigadier. "No experience," he said, "but sometimes that's an advantage. Are you fit . . . physically, I mean?"

"I think so," said Eustace. "I don't get ill."

"Good," said the sales manager. "When can you start?"

"On Monday, if you like."

"Good," he said again, "come and see me at nine-thirty on Monday."

He almost stood up and held out his hand, but instead he added, "You can find your way out?"

"Yes, thanks," said the Brigadier.

When he had gone Mordaunt-Graham rang for his secretary. As she stood by the desk he allowed his arm to saunter around her waist.

"What do you make of *him*, Daphne?" he asked.

"Sort of superior, isn't he?" she analysed.

"That was my impression. I should have asked him for references and things, but I felt I ought to stand to attention and salute."

"One of nature's gentlemen, I shouldn't wonder," said Daphne, easing around to the front of the desk. "Not like *you*, Bill," she giggled, slapping his hand playfully . . .

Eustace Dodman felt agreeably surprised. Sipping the mid-morning pinker, he told himself that it wasn't everyone who could

walk straight into a job, first shot, and although the morning's interview now seemed distant and quite unreal there was no doubt about the fact that he was commencing a publishing career in three days' time. The small starting wage did not bother him in the least. One had to begin at the bottom and work up; and in any case, an extra six quid a week would make all the difference. He smiled with satisfaction as he pondered that six meant 48 pink gins, and when it dawned on him that these could only be consumed at night, as he would be working during the day, the edges of his moustache twitched upwards in a gay little grin.

" Large pinker, Coutts," he ordered, and when Colonel Gorman-Blount came in, it was Eustace Dodman who pushed the boat out first. A few minutes before one o'clock he left the bar and put a call through to a Sloane number, and a moment later he was speaking to Gil.

" Gil? Hullo, this is Eustace Dodman."

" Brigadier! " she cried delightedly. " Just a mo. I'll switch the wireless off."

He waited, a little breathless, heard her steps approach the telephone. " Hullo," she said again, " I can hear now."

" I have tickets," he lied, " for a play next Friday. Could you accompany an old man, do you think? "

There was a moment's pause. " Next Friday . . . today week. Yes, I'd love to. How very sweet of you. Where shall we meet? "

" I thought we might have an early supper . . . they do an excellent one at Nolly's, I hear, smoked salmon and things."

" Perfect! " She was plainly excited.

" Six o'clock do for you? " said the Brigadier.

" Perfect," she said again. " I'll look forward to seeing you so much."

" So will I," murmured Eustace, a moment later, hoping it did not sound as though he was looking forward to seeing himself. " Six on Friday, then? "

" Yes. Good-bye."

By Sunday the crocuses, yellow and mauve, had become patches of bright carpet in the park and as Eustace walked briskly by the side of the southerly bridle path he felt as confident as he had been that splendid day when the banana boat steamed into Port Mac-Andrew four years before. Everything was going to be much easier than he had feared. Soon, when Lowater's appreciated his worth and recognized it with a commensurate rise in salary, he even visualized moving away from the Cromwell Road and into a bachelor apartment nearer St. James's.

The crocuses winked at him. To add immeasurably to his sudden happiness there were two tickets for the Palladium in his pocket. He was humming as he turned into Hyde Park Corner, and he even nodded warmly to the conductor of the fourteen bus that took him east to clubland.

Next day he rose to the same methodical schedule. At nine-thirty precisely he was walking up Lowater's stairs. At the top a

cleaner, on her hands and knees, swilled soapy water over the linoleum, but no one answered when he rang the bell on the door marked " Inquiries."

" No one 'ere yet, sir," said the cleaner. " You're an early bird and all."

" I was told to come at nine-thirty."

The char eased herself back onto her thick haunches, " Lawdie, dearie, they rarely gets 'ere before ten."

" I'll wait," said the Brigadier, and for the next minutes he twitched his moustache and pondered vacantly on the meaning of " general duties," every now and then stepping aside as the char's soapy rag slopped around his shoes.

The secretary was first to arrive. She appeared momentarily startled to see him, but quickly snatched back her ebullient self-composure and said, " Good morning, Mr. Dodman, sorry we're late. Mr. Graham ought to be here in a jiffy, and Mr. Lowater usually comes in at ten-thirty, but he'll be late this morning because he's up at Bodkins seeing about some money. Come in here and sit down, Mr. Dodman."

He followed her into a small cubbyhole of an office and sat on the chair she had quickly cleared of dog-eared manuscripts. The secretary started to open a small bundle of letters, sorting the contents into four piles which seemed to the Brigadier to be bills, letters, orders, and cheques, in that order of size. He cast his eyes about the room. There was a green filing-cabinet, on top of which were piles of loose papers, dust jackets, odd copies, and folders. The walls were dotted with nails, on which were stuck receipts, bills, copy invoices, and duplicate orders. " A busy little show," he commented to himself, " growing fast, I dare say," but he got no further before Mr. Graham bounded up the stairs into his office and slammed the door.

" He'll ring for you in a sec," said the secretary, and sure enough a moment later the telephone tinkled and the Brigadier heard a voice say calmly, " Ask Mr. Dodman to step this way, please."

" You say you've no experience of publishing? " said Mordaunt-Graham, when Dodman had settled himself on the upright chair.

" None, except in general administration."

" Accounts? "

" I ran the imprest account at Shillong."

" All accounting's the same, a bloody bore," said the sales manager. " We publish general books . . . fiction mostly. What we're looking for is a chap to do the odd jobs, pack a bit, keep the books, learn the business from scratch, y'know. How do you feel about that? "

" I'll do anything you say," said the Brigadier. " I think I learn quite quickly."

" Splendid." He rang for the secretary. " Daphne, Mr. Dodman is starting at the bottom. Just while I go through the mail I think he might send off the MSS. in your office, with rejection slips. Get him started on that, will you? "

The secretary led him out and indicated the pile of manuscripts in her office. " I think you'd better bring these downstairs to the trade counter," she said. " There's more room and a packing-bench. You know how to pack a parcel, I suppose? "

" I think so," said the Brigadier.

" It doesn't matter if you don't. Jim will show you, if he's in yet." They had reached the bottom of the stairs and passed through a door which he had not noticed on his way up, and he found himself in a large room which occupied the whole of the ground floor. The place was almost entirely filled with racks of books and large brown-paper parcels stacked neatly in piles. Propped on a high stool, tilted so that it was only prevented from falling backwards by a foot wedged under the bench, was a languid youth munching a currant bun. He eased himself upright with apparent effort as they entered, and finally slid from the stool.

" Morning, Daphne, chilly out today," he volunteered. " Has the guvnor decided what to do with the export orders yet? "

" No," said Daphne curtly, " you'll know soon enough."

" When they get some lolly out of Bodkins, I suppose."

" Don't be saucy. This is Mr. Dodman, who is learning the business. You're to show him how to pack the rejects, and when they're done come upstairs again, will you, Mr. Dodman? "

" Very well," said the Brigadier. He set the heavy bundle of manuscripts on the bench.

The secretary continued, " This is Jim, who calls himself warehouse manager, but he's the office boy really."

" Nark it," said Jim. " How do, chum." He laid the bun on a pile of new dust jackets and held out his hand. The Brigadier took it limply and nodded. When Daphne had left, the boy showed him in methodical steps how to pack a parcel, and after a couple of shots the Brigadier got the hang of it and for the next two hours he was busily engaged. By lunch-time he felt quite at home in the little warehouse, and the manuscripts lay in a neat stack, neatly wrapped in strong brown paper.

" What do we do with them now? " he asked.

" They go by post, when they give us the lolly. Sometimes they just sit around for weeks."

" I'll post them," said the Brigadier, " and claim it back later."

" That's up to you," said Jim. " The P.O.'s round the corner in Wilton Place."

He allowed the boy to pile the parcels on his arms and open both doors. It was only a short walk, but when he reached the post office his arms ached and he was distinctly out of breath. After lunch, when he returned to work, his effort was greeted with warm approval.

" Thank you very much, Dodman," said Mordaunt-Graham, " that was very good of you. How much was the postage? "

" Ten shillings and eightpence," he said.

The sales manager fished in his pocket and produced a crumpled ten-shilling note. " Here," he said, " I'll owe you eightpence."

Dodman pocketed the money and asked, " What would you like me to do now? "

" Well," said Mordaunt-Graham, " Mr. Lowater is in now. I think you'd better come in and meet him." Together they went into the adjoining office and the Brigadier was immediately struck by the youth of the man behind a large, ornate desk. It also became apparent that he was a little the worse for drink, for his eyes were misty and shot with streaks of blood.

The Brigadier and Mordaunt-Graham stood silently before the desk while Francis Lowater finished a conversation on the telephone, " . . . it's all very well, Bodger, but small firms like ours just can't afford to wait, it's hard enough normally without a book debt which is so old it's got whiskers . . . Of course I understand, but there's got to be a limit, you know . . . Hundred and fifty, yes, that would be something to go on with . . . In the post tonight, good. 'Bye."

He replaced the receiver with a bang. " That was Bodger, of Bodkins," he scowled. " It's a serious business, Bill. They owe us eight hundred, three of it from last October. We just can't operate on those conditions."

" I know," said Mordaunt-Graham, " but what can you do? "

" More capital, I suppose," said the boss. " This is the new man, eh? How do you do? "

He half got up and held out a thin white hand which the Brigadier took firmly. " It's nice to have you with us, but if Bodkins don't pay up we may have to think again. Do you know anything about the trade? "

" Nothing," said the Brigadier, " except how to send back manuscripts."

" He packed them all and posted them himself," said Mordaunt-Graham. " I think I was right stipulating an army man, they have initiative."

" What were you in the army? " asked Mr. Lowater.

The Brigadier froze, but he had prepared himself for this. " Nothing much," he said. " I was in the K.O.S.B's."

" Good regiment . . . Both wars, I suppose? "

" Yes," he said.

" Well, since you're here, I'll tell you about Bodkins. They are one of the biggest wholesale houses in the country, but at present they're in deep water and no one can get paid. It's making it very difficult for lots of little firms, including ours, but it's only temporary."

" A matter of tiding over," remarked the Brigadier sagely.

" That's exactly it, a matter of tiding over somehow."

" I wish I could help."

" That's very good of you," said Mr. Lowater, " but you can't, so we'll have to manage."

" I was thinking of putting Mr. Dodman on to Statements," said Mordaunt-Graham. " He can write them long-hand direct from the ledger."

"Good idea," said the boss. "Sooner we get them out sooner we'll get paid, perhaps."

It was not until the middle of the week that Eustace Dodman hit on the idea. He was in the bar for his usual evening drink, and since now he could afford four pinkers at a sitting his brain was working remarkably well. He was also in a happy frame of mind. At Lowater's everything had gone smoothly, and he was picking up the threads of the business. That morning Lowater had asked his advice on the design of a dust jacket, which showed if anything did that he was becoming one of the family. But at the same time he felt that a heavy atmosphere of worry pervaded the firm and it seemed that the impasse at Bodkins might easily see him on the street if something was not done.

The fact that he was beginning to enjoy both the work and the saving an occupied day achieved was really the force behind his idea, and as he fingered his fourth pinker at the end of the long bar his mind reasoned thus: "Bodkins owed them eight hundred pounds. They paid a hundred and fifty, on Tuesday, but today we sent up another two dozen *Gorki's Imperial Dream* at 15/- less 40 per cent, making twenty-one pounds sixteen shillings or thereabouts, and the way that particular book was selling, let alone the others, it was clear that they would be ordering more very shortly."

It was plain to Eustace Dodman that a loan would be as safe as the Bank of England. With the directness and immediacy with which he made all his decisions, he knew then what he would do. The procedure was simple, a letter to War House to ask for the appropriate forms . . . It could only be a matter of a week or two before his right to amortize a third of his pension became manifest in the shape of a large cheque. With this he would buy a share in Lowater's, and perhaps become a Director. A rough calculation showed him that amortization of a third would cut his net pension to about ten pounds a week, but the great thing was, he'd be in a position to draw very much more in the way of salary from Lowater's. In a state of suppressed excitement he ordered a fifth pinker. Tomorrow he would see Francis about it, and at the same time he might as well tell them he was a Brigadier . . .

When Daphne brought him a cup of tea in the packing-room next morning, the Brigadier asked, "Is Mr. Lowater in yet? will you ask him if he could spare me a moment?"

"He just came in, Mr. Dodman." Daphne climbed back up the stairs and it was only a minute before her solid feet descended and he heard her cry from halfway down, "Right now, Mr. Dodman, bring your cuppa with you, Mr. Lowater said."

He did as he was told but although his hand was quivering just a little, he reached the boss's office without spilling a drop.

"Sit down, Dodman," said the young man. "Smoke?"

"Thank you," said the Brigadier.

"Nothing wrong, I hope? You seem to be settling down fine. I liked the methodical way you dealt with the export orders."

"Thank you," said the Brigadier again. "No, there's nothing wrong, but I was thinking last night that I might be able to help."

"What do you mean exactly, Mr. Dodman?"

"Over the Bodkins business."

"Oh?" Francis Lowater was staring at him intently.

"I'd better tell you first that I'm a retired Brigadier. I found the pension by itself wasn't any good so I decided to take a job. Stops me spending money midday," he added without smiling.

"I had an idea you weren't a Regimental Sergeant-Major." Francis pulled himself up almost erect. "How's that going to help with Bodkins?"

"Well, there's a system that allows retired regular officers to take out a part of their pensions as a lump sum. I'd like to use mine to help the firm. It's safe enough, isn't it?"

"I see what you mean. It's very good of you . . . er . . . Brigadier . . . very helpful indeed. What sort of thing were you thinking of in return?"

"Well, nothing really. When Bodkins pay up you can pay me back, but the firm might like to increase my salary a little to make up for the income I'll lose by helping you. Perhaps when I know more about the business there might be a vacancy on the board."

"Everything's possible," murmured Lowater. "We'll certainly be in a position to pay you more if we have a buffer against Bodkins being slow. What sort of figure were you contemplating?"

"About a thousand," said the Brigadier.

"Thousand a year . . . that's a lot of money."

"No, no, I didn't mean that. I meant to say I could lend you about a thousand. I suppose if you added on about another fiver a week I could make do until things improve."

"We'll make it six," said the boss, "double your present, in other words."

The Brigadier drew a small diary from his waistcoat pocket. "When do you want the money?" he asked.

"There's no desperate panic," said Lowater, "any time that suits you."

"I'll drop War House a line today." He collected his teacup from the corner of the desk and rose to go.

"Just a minute, Brigadier . . . Tell me, what makes you do this?"

"I like the work."

"Packing?" said Lowater with a frown.

"Yes, there's a lot more to it than you'd think. Getting the ends tucked in neatly is quite an art, you know."

When he had left, Francis Lowater rang for his sales manager. "I think we're saved, Bill," he grinned happily. "The old boy's a Brigadier, would you believe it. Rather than see us go under he's cashing in a part of his pension to stop-gap against the six-seventy Bodkins owe."

"That's grand," said the sales manager evenly, "but what happens if Bodkins go bust?"

"Don't be defeatist," said the boss.

For the first time in a very happy week the minutes were dragging like heavy-footed prisoners and the Brigadier found himself drawing back the cuff of his white packer's coat to glance impatiently at his watch. Jim noticed it and remarked cheekily: " You got a date or summin, Gen'ral, sir? " Ever since it had become known that Old Dodman was an exalted person in disguise, Jim had split the difference between sauce and respect and used an emphatically pronounced " Gen'ral, sir."

At around four-thirty Daphne slipped into the packing-room and placed a square buff pay-packet on the edge of the bench, coyly, and whispered, " That's for you, Mr. Brigadier," but it was not until he was in the cloakroom at the Safari that he hid behind the coat racks and tore off the seal-easy gum strip and extracted the money. Then he went to the bar and ordered a large pink gin.

Nolly's, he calculated, could be reached in five minutes, so if he left at ten to six and walked up Jermyn Street by way of Duke Street there would be time for another one before he had to leave. Two large ones always left him steady and confident and feeling younger; and tonight he wanted to feel as young as possible, and cut a bit of a dash, so Mike Segrave's sister wouldn't feel she was going out with an old man.

At Nolly's he chose a table at the far end of the room, from which he could keep the swing door under constant surveillance, and for the next ten minutes he played with a small conical glass in fingers that would not keep still, and gazed more or less vacantly at the cold buffet menu. She could have whatever she chose, he mused, oysters, smoked salmon, anything. Tonight nothing need be spared for since Wednesday he had made up his mind to spend the whole of his first week's pay on their outing.

At ten past six the door swung round, rather faster than usual, and Gil radiated into the room. He saw her at once, pushed his table aside, and started to cross the room towards her, holding himself very erect and smiling benignly. He took the pink-gloved hand which she extended, and heard her breathless apologies, then he was leading her back to the table and ordering a champagne cocktail and another large pink gin. Finally he sat back and said, " I began to think you had forgotten."

" *Heavens*, no! I've looked forward to this, I promise. It was the traffic. I got a taxi in the end, but a bus would have been just as quick."

" It's a red-letter night for me, too," he said. " I think I may become a director in a large publishing firm—no names yet, mind you, but things seem to be going in the right direction."

" How *clever*! " Gil seemed genuinely impressed. " Here's to luck and good hunting and all the rest of it." She raised the tall-stemmed glass to her lips and as the Brigadier followed suit he allowed his eyes to meet hers momentarily over the tilted rims.

" The show starts at seven-thirty," he said. " That gives us plenty of time so let's eat really well. Here, see if there's anything

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you like. If not, we can always go somewhere else," he added gallantly. She browsed over the menu, muttering yum-yums, and for a moment or two he was able to study the profile of her lovely little face, remarking to himself on the artistry which had planned the two short wisps of hair that curled above her ears.

Gil laid the menu aside and smiled up into the Brigadier's attentive face. "We can't do better than here," she said. "I'd like turtle soup and Scotch salmon."

"You shall," he said, involuntarily allowing his eyes to wander over the price columns, "and a bottle of iced Chablis."

As the meal drew to an end, he became progressively more surprised that the great gap of age which wallowed between them was more than adequately bridged by the fast patter of conversation which they were both able to sustain. Later, when they were comfortably settled in the third row of the stalls, the feeling of intimacy increased as they laughed together, naturally and harmoniously, at the Palladium's bearded fare. More than once Eustace Dodman found his eyes resting on the girl's profile but quickly, and he hoped without her knowing, he averted his stare and returned his puzzled eyes to the stage. And once, when a Hungarian acrobat was flying through the air in a complicated and dangerous double somersault, he felt her small warm hand settle on his in a fleeting moment of breathless concern. He did not move, and a second later it was returned to the demure tranquillity of her own lap.

The drive back to Chenniston Square took only ten minutes down a near-deserted Piccadilly, and during most of it they were either silent or chatting post mortems on the show. It was not until they had turned into Sloane Street that Gil said, "It's been a *wonderful* evening, I can own up now that I didn't think it would be half so wonderful."

"Shall I own up, too?" he said. "For me it's been one of the happiest evenings of my life."

Gil hesitated, then putting her hand through his arm she half giggled, "It's so much nicer to go out with someone who knows what to do. Lots of my friends dither so, about eats and wine. I *like* being looked after and having things *organized*."

The Brigadier pressed her hand against his side with a quick, hard movement. "That's the advantage of being an old man," he smiled down at her.

"Silly," whispered the girl, "I haven't noticed much decay about you!"

They were both laughing when the taxi muttered to a stop.

"Before you go," he said, "do you think we might repeat the exercise some time?"

Light from a street lamp bit the darkness from her pale smooth skin. Gil turned two blue serious eyes into his. The Brigadier only half heard her earnest acquiescence, "I'll be terribly disappointed if we don't, very soon."

Mr. Lowater had arranged for Spooner, Mickledime, and Mitts

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to draw up the promissory note. Two weeks had elapsed since Eustace Dodman's decision to amortize, and that morning the cheque had arrived from War House. Eustace wasted no time. As soon as Francis Lowater reached the office, he went upstairs and knocked on the door. Completing the transaction was then only a matter of minutes . . . the time it took to write his personal cheque and receive the promissory note in return.

"Well, thank you, Brigadier," said the boss, "this eases the strain. We'll buy that note back as soon as Bodkins pay up. In the meanwhile, I suppose it's safe to continue supplying them?"

"They're safe enough, aren't they? Didn't you say the firm had been going a couple of hundred years?"

"More," said Lowater reassuringly, "I think they're only going through a rough patch at present."

"We have an order in today for fifty Grautmann *Empirical Absurdities*. Shall I send them?"

"Yes, I think so. I'll be watching the account very carefully . . . for your sake as well as mine."

The Brigadier went down to the packing-room and busied himself with the self-inflicted task of stock reorganization to fit in with a new scheme for "looking out" which he had cooked up on his own and which, incidentally, Mordaunt-Graham had accepted with unconcealed approbation. And now that he had, as it were, a monetary stake in the business, the job became even more absorbing than before.

Upstairs the boss drew a company cheque for £100 payable to himself, then he wrote two personal cheques, one for £62 8s. to Knickerbocker, turf accountants, and the second to a Mrs. Ivy Jones of Kilburn for £30. Having enveloped these, he sat back with a thin smile of satisfaction playing about his lips . . .

During his long career, Brigadier Dodman had often heard tell of the paralytic boredom that soon overcame retired army officers, but he for one had to acknowledge that civilian life carried its blessings. After only a couple of months he had accomplished much. The little niche he had dug for himself at Lowater's showed emphatically that the army had not been able to atrophy his brain as was commonly supposed. The way the executives of the firm were giving him more and more to do showed profoundly that they thought well of him, and from time to time he even felt that he was becoming to a certain degree indispensable. *And* he was earning twelve quid a week with a prospect of more later.

The flimsiest calculation showed that, what with the saving at midday, he was now living well within his income, and it was therefore justified and natural that he moved to larger accommodation two blocks nearer the West End. Here he could even entertain a little and when this thought tickled his brain it was towards Gil that it unsalaciously focused.

A month had passed since their first outing together, and during this time he had seen her only once, for tea at Chenniston Square and a visit to a cinema in Chelsea on a Sunday afternoon. But

on this occasion Mike Segrave had come too. And once, on the day before he was to take her to the Army v. Navy rugby match at Twickenham, Bosworth at the Safari had varied his usual " no mail today " with an almost surprised, " Here's a letter for you, sir."

It had been from Gil, just a few scrawled lines which ran: *Terribly sorry, tomorrow's off. I'm heartbroken, but it just can't be helped. Will explain next time we meet.* He had taken Gorman-Blount instead, but although in the past he had always enjoyed this match, somehow the spark that day seemed to have died pretty low.

He had left it a week or two before ringing her again. Constant telephoning somehow offended the sense of delicacy, though goodness knows, his emotions nagged at him more or less constantly now to arrange another evening like that first, lovely meeting. He drank his two large pinkers fairly fast and went into the hall, gave Bosworth the number, and a moment later was speaking to Gil.

" I'm sorry you missed the match," he fenced carefully, " it was a splendid game. Bagster's try in the last minute was the best I've seen."

" You're not half as sorry as I am," bubbled the girl. " I'm so sorry if I let you down."

" Not a bit," he said. " I say, I hope you won't think I'm being an old bore . . ." he decided to belly-flop into the heart of things . . ." the trouble is I know so few people in London and you're one of the ones I know best. Please say if you don't like the idea, I'll quite understand, but I want to take you out again, to the ballet if you like it. There's a good programme, *Coppelia* or something at Sadlers Wells. I hope you can come, but please say if you don't think you ought to."

Gil answered immediately. He noted gratefully the impatient sincerity in her voice. " Don't be such an old silly. I told you after the theatre I'd just love to come out with you again, any time—for heaven's sake, why be so shy? "

" Thank goodness," he heard himself murmur, then louder: " I must say, I don't feel particularly old when I'm out with you, Gil. Life in the old dog yet, I believe. I like that tune which goes through *Coppelia*, you know the one . . ." he tried to hum down the line and was delighted to hear the girl's silvery laugh come back to him . . . " Next Wednesday if it's all right by you, let's meet at Nolly's again."

" You're a dear. I didn't recognize the tune but I love *Coppelia*. Same time? "

" Yes."

" By the way, before we ring off, do you like serious music *without* the dancing? "

" Heavens, yes," lied the Brigadier.

" I've an idea. I'll be all alone over the weekend. Come and have some supper and listen to the gramophone."

" I'll bring a bottle of champagne," he said, " but let's discuss it on Wednesday."

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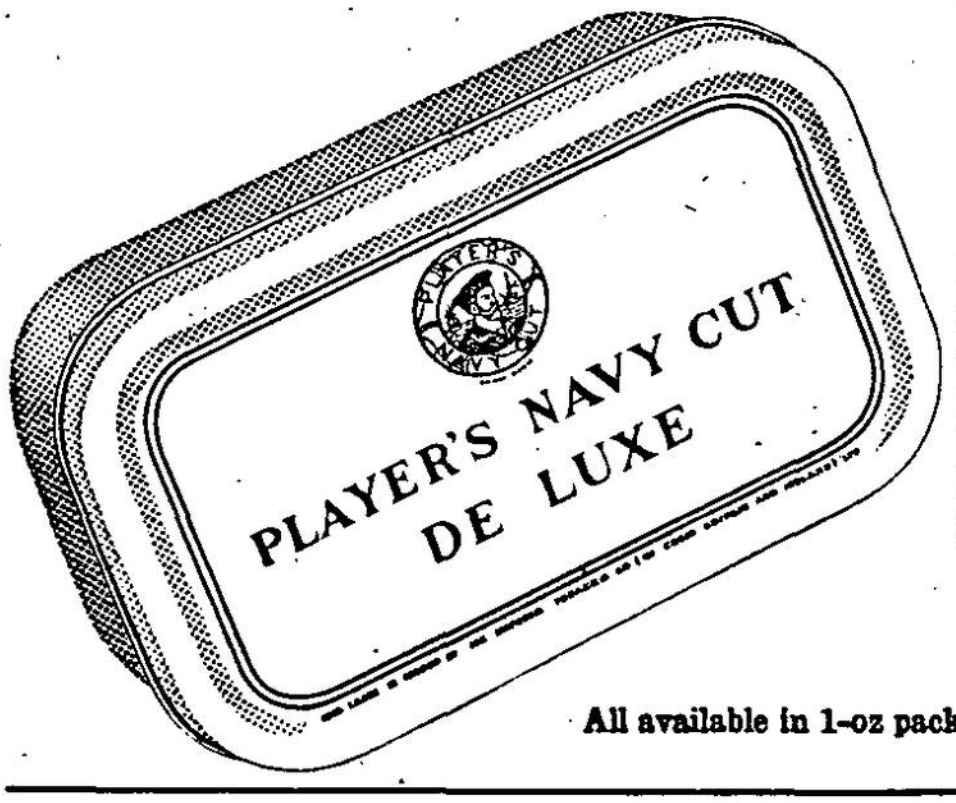

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On his way in to dine he found himself humming the tune from *Coppelia* loud enough to capture the sidelong glance of a waiter.

He had not understood what the hopping chaps were all about, but having Gil with him made the evening exciting enough. Every time the lilting theme tune tinkled from the orchestra pit he allowed himself to touch her arm and whisper, "That tune makes the ballet, I think," or "Ah, there it is again." Some of the time he spent discreetly watching the intense pleasure on her face and suppressing a strong urge to place his arm round her shoulders. This, he knew, was impossible though, who knows, perhaps one day they would grow close enough together, and he would be able to show his feelings without frightening her away; but somehow the possibility seemed, at the moment, aggravatingly remote.

The rest of the week passed, as usual now, quickly and happily for him. He finished the rearrangement of the stock at Lowater's, was invited to sit in and listen at two sales conferences, and altogether life had assumed an aspect so pleasant that he frequently found himself congratulating Brigadier Dodman on his impressive good fortune. If the harmony of existence had been ruffled at all, it was only a snippet in the paper that Friday which ran, *An emergency meeting to discuss the affairs of Bodkins will be held at Bodger House on Monday, April 15th. All creditors are expected to be present.* But he soon washed this out of his mind when Daphne brought the small buff pay-envelope at four o'clock. Twelve pounds, less P.A.Y.E., was a jolly good screw for a chap who, a few weeks previously, did not know a book from a bazooka.

On his way up to the Safari that evening he bought a bottle of Krug '45, which was carefully wrapped for him in pink tissue paper, and this he left with Bosworth, to be collected on Sunday. Then he went into the bar, where Gorman-Blount greeted him like a long-lost friend.

They had done what the Colonel called a "reversed double," standing each other large ones—when he nudged Dodman and nodded towards the door. "The big fair man who's just come in with Ernie Cohen, you ought to know him, Dodders, you're in the book world."

"I don't know anyone yet, except the people I work for." He glanced casually round and allowed his gaze to settle for an instant on the newcomer. He was a man with black, intense eyes and a gaudy striped tie.

"Who is it?" asked the Brigadier disinterestedly.

"A man called Bodger . . . fabulous character, they tell me, who owns Bodkins." Dodman placed his other elbow on the bar and turned to make a closer study. "Really?" he said. "I know of him, they owe us a packet of money."

Sunday had been sunny all day, and when towards seven o'clock the Brigadier collected the Krug and stepped into the Mall, the last of the light was still strong enough to throw sharply reliefed shadows across the road. Ten minutes later he was disembarking

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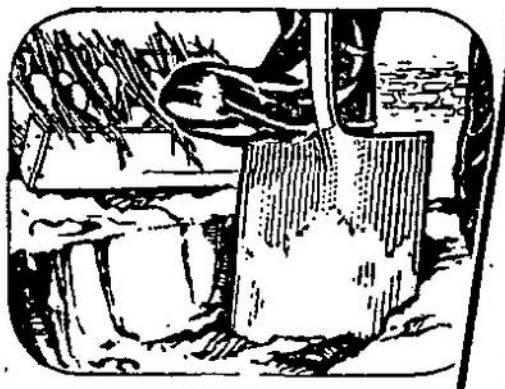

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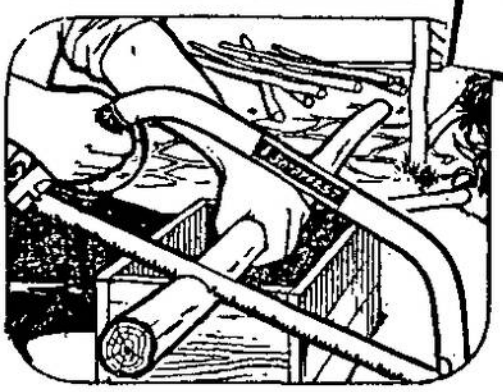

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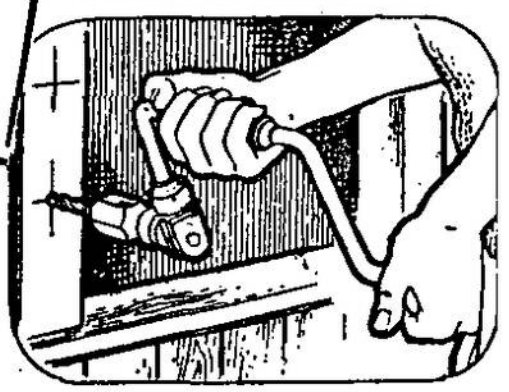

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from a taxi in Chenniston Square, clutching his bowler in one hand and the bottle in the other, and there was Gil standing in the door to greet him, smiling radiant like spring sunshine.

" Here we are," he said, " Krug '45. We ought to ice it for a minute or two."

" I'll take it," said the girl, " come in and make yourself comfortable." When she left with the champagne, the Brigadier stood by the mantelpiece and twitched his moustache. He saw that a cold supper had already been laid out with considerable care on the dumb-waiter; that two polished champagne glasses stood upside down on two little round lace doilies. This caused him to smile contentedly, for he liked his word to be taken for granted.

When Gil returned she said, " Have a pink gin or something while the champagne cools off? "

" Thanks, I'd like one," he said, " shall I pour it out? "

" Yes, please, and pour one for me, too." She fell onto the long sofa, lay back, and threw her arms out. " You know," she said, " I rather like living alone. They don't quite realize that I'm grown up. Thanks. Pink gins are for men, Mike says. I'm blowed if I see why."

" Most of the women in Port MacAndrew drank pink gin," said the Brigadier, easing himself into an armchair. " Things are changing the whole time. Not so long ago only charladies drank gin . . . too coarse for the genteel palate, I suppose; now everyone does, disguised as cocktails."

They had three pink gins each while Gil, from time to time, chose light, gay music for the gramophone, chatted and laughed and seemed utterly at ease with him. It was not until nine o'clock that they decided to dine, popping the champagne and sitting side by side on the deep, long sofa, balancing plates of cold chicken on their knees.

Once the Brigadier looked intently at her and said, " Sometimes you seem like an old friend, Gil. My friends all call me Eustace. It's a stupid name, but I wish you would."

Gil giggled, " Eustace, Eu-Eu for short? No, that's too familiar. Stacey? No, too Western. Ace? What about Ace? "

" No, thanks, sounds like a card sharp."

" O.K., I'll stick to plain Eustace. You know, I can't ever imagine making love to a Eustace."

" Have you ever tried? "

" Good heavens, no! I say, Eustace, I'm feeling quite tiddly, Mike'd be furious."

" It's a good thing, every now and then. When I was your age I hardly drank at all . . . only at regimental dinners, really, but that was because I couldn't afford to. Let's dance? "

They had finished the meal and Gil had pushed the trolley back to the wall.

" Dance? " she said with unconcealed surprise. " What a gorgeous idea. Just a mo, I'll find a foxtrot."

Smiling at each other, they came together and danced slowly

through the empty spaces of the room, holding each other at a careful distance like dancers at a regal ball. A minute or two later the distance had dwindled and Eustace was conscious every now and then of the movement of her body against his, and it was not without a little tremor of excitement that he knew she wanted to be held closer. Soon they were scarcely moving and her auburn hair was spilling across his shoulder and her eyes were closed and the next second his lips were brushing the smooth skin of her forehead.

" We'd better sit down," he whispered, and when she nodded he led her back to the sofa. " I think I'd better go."

" It's early yet, not eleven, I shouldn't think."

" Gil." He said her name as he sat down beside her.

The girl was smiling at him from half-closed eyes, a strange little smile that was not of amusement. " Yes," she said, " yes? "

He came straight to the point, " Perhaps it isn't a good idea for us to meet again . . . too often."

" Same old story," she whispered, " because you're an old man and I might be bored! I'd have thought you would know by now—"

" Not a matter of being bored," he interrupted, " not that at all. I've never enjoyed anyone's company as much as yours. I think when that happens it's usually mutual. The point is for me it's gone a little further. I think I'm in love with you or something idiotic."

He stopped abruptly, surprised at his own eloquence. Gil turned away, and seemed to collapse into the corner of the sofa where she remained limply, unable to speak.

Eustace went on, " I didn't think it was possible for an old man like me, specially after all these years of being alone. I'm terribly sorry, but I knew I ought to tell you before I make an ass of myself. I think I'll go now, and perhaps we can meet again in a week or two." He started to get up, but with a quick firm movement, the girl snatched his arm and pulled him towards her.

" Dear Eustace, I could never have guessed." She held him tightly and allowed him to kiss her lightly on the lips. " We'll meet again and again," she promised, " whenever you like. I'm very proud to be loved by you." Then she was pushing him away gently, and without speaking again he left the room and went blindly into the night.

Monday at Lowater's was the same as any other Monday, except the Brigadier was aware of a restrained alertness about the place which could not be attributable to a shortage of orders, because that morning's mail had been out-of-the-ordinarily good. For some inexplicable reason, known only to the capricious god who lords it over book-trade affairs, James's *Valley of Frightened Doves*, after a miserable start, had suddenly begun to sell. But despite a feeling of nervousness at Lowater's, the Brigadier for the most part was still trying to sort out the problem of his emotions.

All day he had oscillated between hope and hopelessness and oddly enough, for the most part, hope had won against the logical

arguments for the negative. Hope had won, because in some misty, intangible way, he terribly wanted it to, though here his imagination bogged down and was not able in any way to bring the results of his hopes into practical manifestation. For the first time since he had been at Lowater's, on Monday the 15th April, he made his first real mistake by charging postage on a carriage-forward consignment, and when, next morning, Francis Lowater called him to his office, he thought it was to draw attention to his mistake.

The boss looked white and worn. He glanced up at Dodman wearily when he entered, and without the usual greeting he motioned to the upright chair. Then, before starting to speak, he fumbled for a cigarette and the Brigadier saw the shake of his hands as he put the match to the end.

" I didn't sleep last night, Brigadier, not a wink."

" Sorry about that," he said. " Anything wrong? "

" Very much so. I'll keep it brief . . . it's not our fault and there's nothing we can do about it. The trade decided yesterday that Bodkins must be liquidated . . . We might all get threepence in the pound if we're damn lucky, in a couple of years' time. Numbers of small firms will go out of business, and us, well, we've just got to cut our cloth."

The Brigadier's expression had frozen into noncomprehension and it was a second or two before he could speak. The implications were so terrifying that even now his brain refused to accept them.

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" You mean Bodkins won't pay? " he said icily.

"Not only a matter of won't. From yesterday they are not allowed to. A liquidator has taken possession, to safeguard the big boys who have lost anything up to £20,000, so the little bit they owe us just gets lumped in with the general debt."

" But they can't do that," expostulated the Brigadier. " In a sense it's my money they're playing with."

" They've done it," said Lowater placidly. " If we manage to weather the storm you'll get your money back. I'm terribly sorry . . . that's all I can say, and I know you won't hold it against me or the firm."

" No, of course not, of course not." He became silent as the awful truth spread its black impossibility across his gropings, " It means I'll have to go, I suppose? "

" Yes, yes, Brigadier, it does. We'll keep in touch with you, of course, and if we make the grade you'll be the first person we'll think of. Take it from me, your work here has been splendid."

" I'll leave right away," said the Brigadier. " Good-bye." He held out his hand and felt the cold looseness of Lowater's grasp; then he went downstairs to the packing-room, changed into his jacket, and collected one or two personal possessions which he had bought for the good of the firm . . . a steel knife, a razor-blade clamp, a rubber sponge in a plastic case for wetting stamps and sticky paper, and a ready reckoner for working out percentages. A heady feeling had forced any thinking out of his head, and as he stepped into William Street he was barely conscious of his movements, let alone his direction. Clutching his possessions, he crossed Knightsbridge and turned right, into the park. Everything seemed a bit blurred, even the few final crocuses whose dead heads were edged with brown, dotted the spring greenness in muzzy blobs indistinct of shape.

One sentence, short, staccato, recurrent, broke the crust of consciousness: This is the end, this is the end. He did not try to add up what the disaster meant in terms of lost income. It had been impossible before; now, with his pension cut to ribbons and no wages . . . it was the end.

Presently he became aware that passers-by were looking at him and with a great effort he pulled himself erect and stuffed his pieces of paraphernalia into different pockets. Then he turned into Hyde Park Corner and, still numbed with shock, he allowed his instincts to guide him automatically towards the Club.

Back at Lowater's the boss chatted calmly with Mordaunt-Graham over mid-morning tea, "He took it remarkably well," he was saying, " and I don't suppose the loss of an odd thousand will be much of a hardship."

" I'm not so sure," said the sales manager. " We must see that he gets it back, sooner or later."

" Of course," said Mr. Lowater. " Provided there are no more Bodgers around, we should make it up in a year or so."

Daphne came in to collect the cups and without invitation she

volunteered, " I'm terribly sorry Mr. Brigadier has left. A real gent he was—so *rare* these days." The emphasis was coupled with a malicious grin at Mordaunt-Graham . . .

Eustace Dodman did not hear Bosworth speaking to him when he entered the Safari.

He stalked past the desk and climbed the stairs to the smoke-room which, due to the early hour, was still deserted, and it was not until he had thrown himself exhausted into a leather chair that he heard the old servant at his elbow.

" Here's a letter for you, sir."

" Thank you, Bosworth."

" You're not ill, sir? "

" No, I'm not ill, just rather tired."

Slowly and without interest he tore open the envelope and read the brief note, allowing the contents to filter through the crust and join the rest of the numbness in the hard solid thing which his brain was becoming. There was no emotion and no surprise on a face which might already have been dead.

I think you were right, dear Eustace. When you left I stayed awake for hours trying to find a way, but I know it's impossible, and it would be silly if we met again.

Love from Gil.

A cold Siberian wind had snapped spring away from the Cromwell Road; but in a centrally heated flat somewhere in Mayfair a poodle passed snugly into Valhalla, wrapped securely in a mink cape.

The death of Mrs. Esmé Slessor-Dick's poodle was given more coverage in the *Evening Oracle* than the Brigadier's uncomfortable suicide. The little notice, buried away at the bottom of page three, only stated the bare facts: *Brigadier Eustace Semphill Dodman, M.C., was found dead in his Kensington room today. Brigadier Dodman was* 61.

No one knew that he had, in fact, died of a broken heart, that the riding-boot laces which choked the breath from his scrawny neck were only a means of breaking his body, fairly quickly. A day or two later the West Kensington Coroner found " death by suicide whilst the balance of his mind was disturbed," but for some reason or other this did not reach the papers at all.

Forty years of military service, dedicated to King and Country, were filed away at War House for reference by Regimental historians; and at Golders Green a young girl wept alone while a plain deal coffin, bearing one small white wreath, carried Eustace Dodman away for ever.

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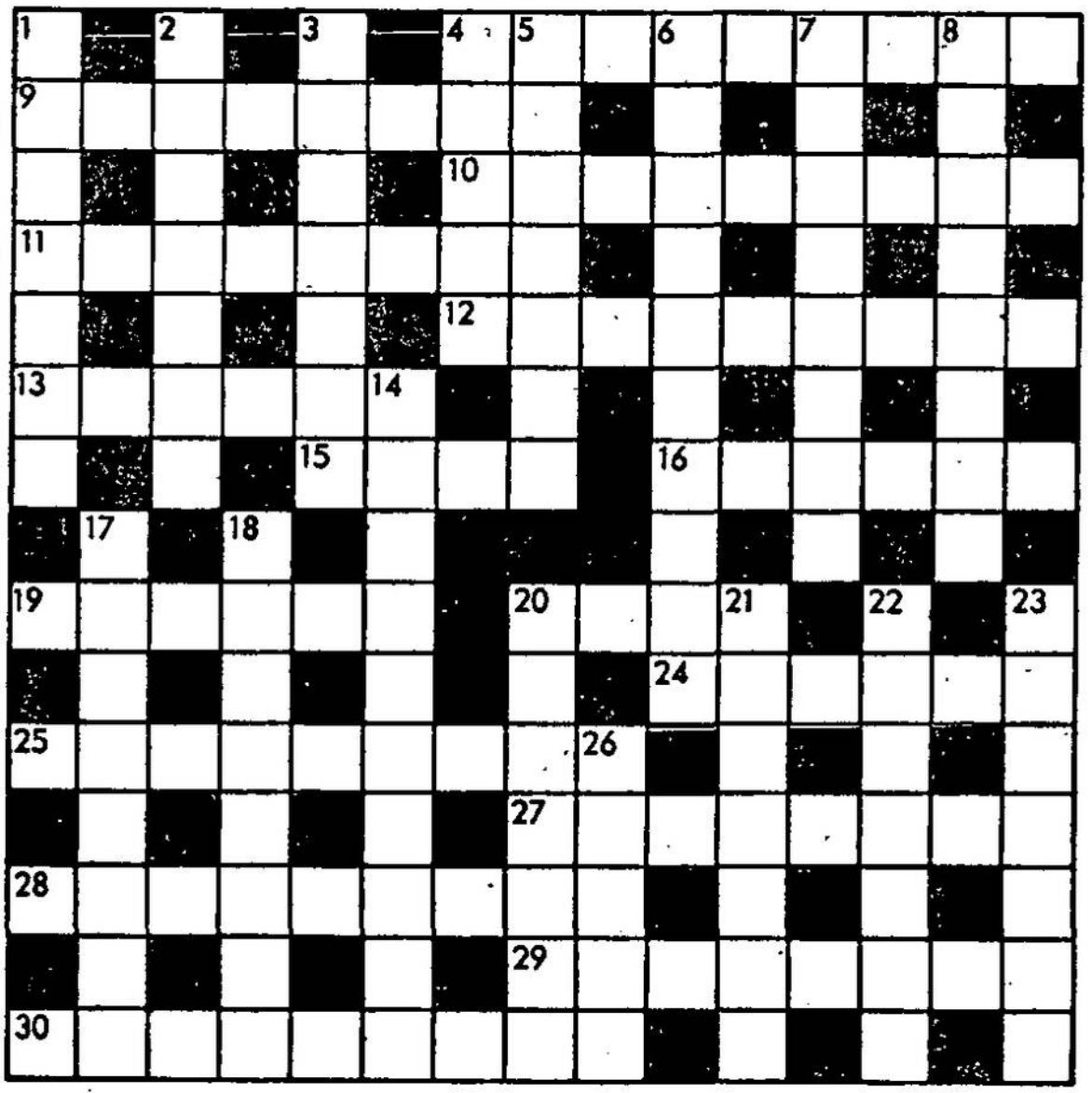

★

Solution on Page 96

★

CLUES

Across

4 Sounds like old mother's ruin (9).

9 Polar fare (3-5).

10 "As sweet as balm, as — — —" (Shakespeare) (4, 2, 3).

11 He likes to 4 across (8).

12 Room for a retiring M.P. ? (9).

13 It's his job to roar (6).

15 They're sold to suckers (4).

16 Keen lad ? (6).

19 Unsuit Dives to a T (6).

20 Borderline interjection (4).

24 "— —, my love, my fair one" (*Song of Solomon*) (4, 2).

25 Type of heading for dead letters ? (5-4).

27 Like Little Bear's porridge (3, 5).

28 An official makes for tidy grain (9).

29 Has the last word (8).

30 Dad's in the getaway (9).

Down

1 Headwear for sick parade (7).

2 German to boot (7).

3 Wendy's home from home (7).

4 A seed grown lighter (5).

5 Dawn-loving ? (7).

6 "— — outcry in her lips' sweet fold" (Shakespeare) (7, 3).

7 Housewife's downfall (4-4).

8 Not likely in 12 across (5-3).

14 Dismissed to rude attics (10).

17 Dickensian cigar (8).

18 What Gibbon did to a proposal ? (8).

20 Clothing to appal an engineer (7).

21 Grasping kind, always feels the pinch (7).

22 Present for a home bird (4-3).

23 Professional on the rocks (7).

26 A cunning way round the close! (5).

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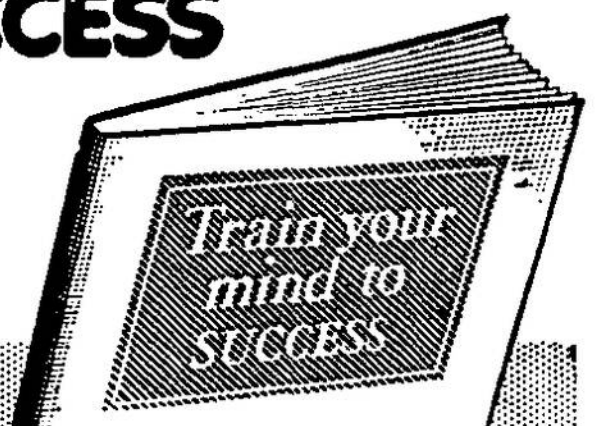

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